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ABSTRACT

This guide offers suggestions for several types of conferences, and is aimed at meeting the needs and interests of different audiences. The report stresses the importance of planning, organizing, and evaluating; it discusses program planning, physical arrangements, speakers, audience involvement, promotion, evaluation, and reporting the results. The appendix provides a checklist for planners and a selected list of conference aids and references designed to help plan and stage a successful meeting. (Author/JF)

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The Conference Planner

A Guide to Good Education Meetings

National School
Public Relations Association
Washington, D.C.

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The Conference Planner

A Guide to Good Education Meetings

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1. Introduction

Overheard in the corridor after an educational conference:

"We didn't accomplish anything at all."

"It wasn't even clear why we were meeting."

"The whole thing was a waste of time."

More than one person is having second thoughts about the endless round of workshops, conferences, seminars, and meetings he is asked to attend.

Many of them, in self-defense, are staying home instead.

Why?

Because too many meetings are poor ones.

Participants complain that "the meeting didn't start on time," that "speakers were dull and uninteresting," the "content was not related to the problems of the participants," and "participants had little opportunity to actually take part in the discussions."

Why are there so many dull, ineffective meetings?

There are many reasons. But the basic one is a lack of communication between those who plan the meeting and those who attend.

Too often, conference planners fail to realize the gulf which may exist between the platform and the audience. All too frequently, a conference is organized around what planners think participants need to know (meaning *should* know). It might be better to prepare the meeting based upon what participants themselves feel they need to know (meaning *want* to know).

One of the basic errors in planning a conference is that the planners fail to get enough advance information about the participants, why they are coming, and what they expect to get out of the conference.

Another cause of dull meetings is that most of the involvement never leaves the speakers' platform. The audience doesn't get involved beyond the usual feeble attempt at the traditional question-and-answer session (usually a flop).

All of these complaints—planners failing to meet the basic needs of those attending the meeting, programs planned for what the planners not the participants have in mind, and the absence of two-way communication —may be traced to the fact that too many conference planners simply don't know how to plan a good conference.

Why Bother?

The workshop or conference, as a medium of communication, as a setting for problem solving, decision making, planning, and idea sharing, is a major activity in education, as well as in business and industry. And the multitude of educational conferences can be attributed to the fantastic increase in the complexity, problems, and pressures of public education.

But a conference should be held only when there is a definite need for a group of people to make decisions on matters of importance to them, to plan new actions to be taken by them, or to improve their knowledge and skills.

Conferences serve several purposes. They make it possible for a group of people, facing the same kind of problems, to work to-

gether to improve the way they handle those problems. Conferences also indicate different ways of solving problems and provide new information, new methods, new ideas, and different points of view. Conferences provide opportunities for participants to exchange knowledge and attitudes gained from actual experiences. Meeting together, people with common goals can decide on joint programs of action.

But the face-to-face communication which should take place in a conference, as well as the reflection and sharing of ideas, must be planned and programed if the conference is to be successful—both to the planners and to the participants.

Today's workshop or conference requires a cooperative effort involving not only the planners but also the resource people and participants who attend.

That's What This Book Is All About

A successful conference can be likened to an iceberg—three fourths of it below the surface. The one fourth that does show (the meeting itself) is too often taken for the whole iceberg. The unseen three fourths (planning, organizing, and evaluating) are generally more important in the long run.

This conference planner offers suggestions for several different types of conferences, aimed at meeting the needs and interests of different audiences. Although some illustrations refer to conferences in school public relations, the book can be used to plan a conference on any subject.

A checklist for planners is included, plus a selected list of conference aids and references designed to help you plan and stage a successful meeting.

2. Program Planning

The first step in planning a conference is to ask:

"Is this conference really necessary?"

Sometimes workshops or conferences are held simply because such an event has always been scheduled by the organization every year. It sounds like a good program activity to organization leaders. Or, as one school district administrator put it, "You've got to get the staff together once in a while."

Conferences and workshops are a way to communicate, nothing more.

There are other ways to communicate with people, some of which may be better for some situations than are conferences. Publication and distribution of printed information may be the appropriate method to communicate some ideas; a closed circuit telecast may be better for other ideas or situations.

If planned and conducted carefully, though, conferences are an excellent way for people to come together to solve problems, to learn, to exchange ideas, and to plan.

But to be effective, meeting planners cannot afford to be muddleheaded. You must have a clear idea of *why* the meeting is being held, and for what purpose. You need some basic questions answered by the authority group in the organization, and you should select some creative people to help in the conference planning process.

What's the Purpose?

Why is the conference being held?

Is it for planning? Training? Fact-finding? Problem-solving? Entertainment?

Start by defining the basic purpose or long-range objectives for the conference. In the long run, the effectiveness of the conference will be measured against these objectives.

Then decide just how much the conference or workshop can be expected to do toward accomplishing these long-range objectives. This decision becomes your short-term objective, or hoped-for results of the meeting. Until you're completely sure about these hoped-for outcomes in terms of program or policy, you can't determine your conference program or methods or anything else.

What are some possible *long-range objectives* for a conference in school public relations? One possibility might be to "improve the school district's public relations program."

Some related *short-term objectives* of such a conference might then well be "informing building principals of the district public relations policy," or "stressing the importance of the teacher's role in school-community relations," or "examining methods of improving the district's internal communications," or "developing a public relations policy for the school district."

Both long- and short-term objectives must consider the needs of the various groups connected with the conference.

In the case of a workshop devoted to a phase of the school district's public relations program, you can identify at least three kinds of needs:

1. The planners' needs.
2. The participants' needs.
3. The school district's needs.

When in Doubt, Find Out

Before you select your conference planning committee, get some basic questions answered by the superintendent or chief executive of the organization. Only after this can any actual planning begin.

Find the answers to the three P's of program planning:

1. What about the *planning committee*? How much authority does it have? What is its relationship to the leadership of the organization? Have any plans already been made by the executive leadership? If so, to what extent? Are there any limitations to the committee membership for planning purposes?
2. What about the *participants*? Who is expected to attend this conference? What about those who should attend, but cannot? Will reports be published and distributed? Is there any information from previous conferences about the needs and interests of the participants who will be asked to attend this meeting?
3. What about the *program*? Are there any instructions as to when and where the meeting should be held, or regarding the length of the meeting? Is there a budget already determined for this conference? How much money is available to the planning committee? Are there any traditional needs which must be met, such as an election of officers or a business session?

Once you have cleared these with the boss, then you can begin the planning.

Get Organized for Planning

You could plan and run the entire conference by yourself.

On the other hand, you (and the participants) would probably benefit from the work of a group of people utilized as a *conference planning committee.*

And at this point you can avoid the pitfall experienced by so many other conference planners. With a planning committee composed of people who represent the thinking and interests of the participants, you can plan a conference aimed at meeting the needs of the people who will attend the meeting, not just the desires of the meeting planners.

Who should serve on the planning committee?

Look for persons who have special abilities in running a meeting: persons who have had experience in group discussion techniques, in the details of conference management (such as registration and/or evaluation techniques), persons skilled in publicity or promotion techniques, human relations experts. Any or all of these resource persons would be extremely helpful in planning your conference.

Seek creative people, those who like to try new ideas. Perhaps it would not be a bad idea to appoint a "devil's advocate" to your planning group. A person who has attended enough poor meetings might be very helpful in suggesting ideas and techniques which could prevent your meeting from resembling previous flops.

Above all, look for people who are the accepted representatives of the organization which hopes to benefit from the conference. Seek persons who have an understanding of the needs of the conference participants.

But brace yourself when your planning committee meets for its initial session.

There will probably be a certain amount of "blowing off steam" by those who were dissatisfied with the last conference—or, for that matter, with most conferences they have attended. There will be certain campaigners for pet ideas and favorite speakers, and too much time spent on many of the details which can and should be handled by the staff.

The chairman of the planning committee will have to tolerate a certain amount of this "ventilation" but should direct the committee into a series of active planning steps which must be undertaken.

First of all, allow adequate time for planning the conference.

Then determine the method by which the planners will communicate with one another during the planning period. It is too easy to divide the planning responsibilities among different subcommittees and then find out that the facilities committee, for example, didn't realize the program committee required overhead projectors. Decide whether each planning committee (or person assigned a specific responsibility) is going to report to the conference director, or whether each subcommittee chairman is to meet periodically

with the director and the other chairmen. Just make sure, during the planning process, that the "right hand knows what the left hand is doing."

Next, decide how many functions need to be assigned to members of the conference planning committee, and whether subcommittees should be established to work on specific responsibilities.

Start with the Participants

The basic weakness in most conferences frequently can be traced to the fact that meeting planners don't take time to analyze their audience.

This sin of omission is probably the major weakness of a large group meeting, primarily because it leads to these other flaws and weaknesses in the structure of the meeting:

- Passive, rather than active, audiences due to listening rather than participating roles.
- Participants lost in the mass of the audience.
- Participants resist suggested changes made from the platform because the speaker is different from the audience member.
- No interchange of viewpoints and information between speakers and members of the audience.

Planning a workshop or conference begins and concludes with the most important element: the participants!

Once you have determined who is expected to attend the conference, and for what purpose, take a closer look at those people.

Participants in a conference or workshop in school public relations, for example, have different needs and interests, dependent upon their own role in the school district or organization.

Too many public relations conferences for classroom teachers, for example, include an introduction to specific techniques and skills which should be reserved for the trained PR specialist, or matters of policy formulation which are the concern of the board of education, or methods of communication which can be used only by school administrators.

Conferences really begin, at the planning level, in the jobs and communities from which the participants come. This means that the planning committee must involve the participants in preparing for the conference long before it is held.

Take a look at the evaluations from the last public relations conference or workshop held for members of the organization. Ask the organization leaders to supply all available facts and records from the previous conference. See if there are any indications of previous successful practices or programs used in a similar conference.

Then, find out what problems are most crucial to the persons who will attend this conference.

This important step not only provides information that is helpful in planning but also helps convince prospective participants that the conference actually will be planned according to their interests. Participants will arrive at the conference more willing to participate and with more active interests.

There are several ways of involving participants in planning the conference program and method of operation. Richard Beckhard, executive director of Richard Beckhard Associates, suggests* several methods, each with its own advantages and weaknesses, depending on the situation and the kind of facts needed:

A questionnaire, sent to all the prospective participants or a representative sample, will provide information fairly easy to tabulate. A questionnaire can obtain facts about the expectations of participants, program suggestions, physical facilities needed, and reactions from previous conference experiences.

* These suggestions are condensed from Richard Beckhard's *How To Plan and Conduct Workshops and Conferences* (New York: Association Press, 1956, 64 pp.) by permission of the author and publisher.

It can also be used to indicate the problems and specific interests of participants.

Questionnaires are easy to use and the information sought can be obtained in a short period of time. Fairly uniform replies are obtained and the results can be reported quickly to the planning committee.

On the other hand, participants may not write frank opinions, even on anonymous questionnaires. People receive many questionnaires and often resist them and are careless in answering. Respondents are not sure whether any use will be made of their replies, and often are inclined to overlook the "open-ended" questions which ask for their general comments or "remarks." In a written questionnaire, it's hard to determine, in some cases, what the respondent meant by his answer, and, unless a personal interview is used, there is no opportunity to ask him.

Beckhard offers some general suggestions for questionnaire preparation:

- Keep it short—one page is desirable.
- Tell the respondent why you are asking for his opinion. Indicate what use will be made of his answers. But don't promise to use every suggestion received unless you intend to do just that. (Let the conference participants know what you did with their replies to the questionnaire. Send them a summary of the survey before the meeting, or present a summary of the fact-finding at an opening session of the meeting.)
- Suggest that it is not necessary to sign the questionnaire.
- Determine the categories of answers you need before you write the questions. For example, if one category is "program suggestions," write a question that will get program suggestions.
- Don't be too specific. Put problems on a general basis so that participants have an opportunity to express personal feelings. For example, if possible it is better to ask them to list in order of importance four or five problems than to give them four or five typical problems and ask them to rate their preferences.
- Include at least one "open-ended" question such as "General Comments" or "Suggestions."
- Multiple-choice questions work well in topic selection. List a number of possibilities under possible program topics and ask for preferences. Use the questionnaire to give information needed to make adequate replies. For example: "Your planning committee suggests that the general sessions deal with four of the following topics: . . . List your preferences, or add others in the space provided."

Interviews with prospective participants are another method of preconference fact finding. A member of the planning committee, or a staff member, can interview a cross section of the membership or staff who will be invited to the conference. Prospective participants are usually pleased when they are selected for a personal interview and asked for opinions on the upcoming conference. More information is obtainable than through a written questionnaire, as the interviewer can ask for details and elaboration. But interviewing is a time-consuming process which requires skill on the part of the interviewer. Only a small sampling of the participants can be obtained through the use of interviews and it is difficult to correlate the facts obtained. It is also difficult to keep the interviewer's personal biases from entering into the report he makes to the planning committee.

If the interview technique is going to be part of your preconference fact-getting, use a standard interview form like a questionnaire. This gives your interviewer a "track to run on" and provides some measure of uniformity in reporting the results. Interviewers should be trained, or at least thoroughly briefed, before they seek a sampling of the participants to interview. Interview representative participants, who should remain anonymous in the reporting of the re-

sults. And don't rely on the interview technique alone. It might be best to use this method as a supplement to other procedures.

Another planning technique which can be helpful to both planners and participants is the *preparatory meeting*, at which members of the staff or the planning committee meet with the people who will be attending the conference. The purpose of this preconference "confab" is to do some prethinking about the subject to be discussed at the conference, to prepare the people who will be attending the conference, and to provide information to the planners.

This type of preconference fact-getting can be utilized in a school district which plans an inservice training workshop or conference. Planners can meet with the participants in this warm-up, exploratory meeting held within the district. Regional or state-wide preparatory meetings may be held prior to national conferences but require a great deal more planning and preparation. In either case, plenty of thoughtful preparation is required before this method should be used by the conference planners.

There are advantages to this preparatory meeting technique. It is a climate-setter, and it helps create positive expectations about the coming conference. In a group setting, individual suggestions are usually more carefully thought out than those obtained from individual questionnaires or interviews. A number of participants can be involved in this type of meeting, perhaps participating more actively than in the conference itself.

But the same precautions that apply to using preconference interviews or questionnaires apply to the preparatory meeting. Make sure you tell the participants at such a meeting how the information they supply will be used in planning the conference. As in the case of the other techniques, if suggestions are not used by planners, participants feel they have wasted their time in this preconference meeting. And, if the exploratory session is not carefully planned and prepared, fixed opinions can be developed by the participants.

Point out that the preparatory meeting is designed to accomplish the goals of the conference, and make very clear how the information supplied at the meeting will and will not be used in planning the conference. Tell the participants when the summary of these preconference suggestions will be given to them (before or during the conference). If the pre-meeting is to be used in several different locations with different groups of the participants, each meeting should follow a suggested format and a standard reporting form should be sent back to the conference planning committee.

Pick the Time and Place

Now that you have carefully examined the interests of the participants who will attend the conference, select the time and location for the meeting if these factors have not already been determined.

Consider the *timing* for this conference in relation to other activities which may attract the same participants. Keep an eye on interfering holidays and other seasonal pressures. If the conference is being held for members of the staff of a school district, clear the date with all necessary departments. Don't expect many third-grade classroom teachers to attend a public relations conference if it is scheduled for the same day as a third-grade reading teachers meeting. Decide whether the conference is to be held after school, during the school day, or on a weekend. And if you elect to meet during the school day, make sure the personnel department knows about it far enough in advance so adequate substitute teachers can be obtained for your participants who are classroom teachers.

Select a *location* for the conference that is best for the majority of the participants. In the case of a workshop conducted for the staff of a school district, hold the meeting in a central location which provides all the necessary physical facilities. Such meetings are often held in the central administrative offices and may be very handy for the administrators who attend. But a lack of suitable parking, uncomfortable chairs, or nearness to interruptions from other offices may be siz-

able handicaps. Time spent in excessive traveling might well be used for the conference itself, if it were held in a more convenient location.

Often conference planners like to conduct a meeting in an off-the-beaten-track location to assure greater privacy. This may be a good idea, but make sure participants can get there easily and that facilities are adequate and comfortable. One speaker who attended a three-day conference at a campsite in the woods reported spending the night chasing a bat out of his rustic cabin, being forced to use cold water for shaving, and speaking to a chilled audience in an unheated dining room of the main camp building.

Prepare a Budget

Find out how much money has been allocated to the planning committee for the conference and then prepare a detailed budget.

You will have expenses before, during, and after the conference, in most cases, and these should be carefully planned and provided for.

Prior to the conference, you will probably need to budget for such things as printing costs, postage, telephone, supplies, committee meetings, and travel expenses.

Conference expenses include such items as supplies (signs, badges, etc.), equipment, honorariums and expenses for speakers, rental fees, staff travel, custodial expenses, and possibly storage and hauling expenses.

You may also have to pay special fees for an electrician, or an audiovisual equipment operator, tips to service personnel (if you use a motel or hotel), and catering charges for meals served to the conference participants.

After the conference, will you be preparing summary reports, mailing evaluation forms, or shipping any materials? These are costs which should be anticipated and included in your budget.

Once you have completed the conference program, verified the number of speakers, guests, and resource persons who will be attending, the budget can be itemized and totaled.

More Basic Tasks

It depends, of course, upon the scope and nature of your meeting, but these are the basic tasks which usually have to be met by conference planners:

- *Develop the conference program.* This includes deciding what type of sessions will be held and the kind of presentation method most desirable for each session; obtaining speakers, discussion leaders, panel participants, recorders, and any other resource people; and preparing the draft of the final, printed program.
- *Provide for all the physical facilities* which will be required for the conference. This includes not only meeting rooms, and luncheon or banquet facilities, but also chairs, tables, chalkboards, audiovisual equipment, etc. This means close contact with the hotel, university, or other institution which will house the conference and its participants.
- *Publicize and promote* the conference to the potential participants. Publicity probably should also be directed to the entire membership of the organization, to related organizations, to professional and public news media, and—in the case of a regional workshop—to the community where the conference is being held.
- *Provide registration services,* no matter how small the conference. This service is usually provided by universities and large-city convention bureaus, but the conference planning committee will still have plenty to do to assure a smooth registration process.
- *Evaluate the conference.* This includes the fact-finding which is necessary before, during, and after the conference. It assures you of a check on the effectiveness of the planning and the program, and a valuable follow-up to assist

in planning future conferences.

- *Other tasks* which may or may not have to be fulfilled, depending upon the scope of the conference, include: hospitality services, planning or recruiting exhibits, and publishing postconference summaries or reports.

Set up a timetable for planning the conference. This is not difficult if all members of the planning group are in the same community. But getting the planners together for a state-wide, regional, or national conference poses some real problems. In this case, the entire planning committee should meet at least twice.

Initially, and most important, they need to make basic decisions on the type of meeting, length, time and place, the basic program and resource people required, the participants for whom the meeting is to be held, and the planning organization. Then members of the staff and subcommittees can go to work on the details. The entire planning group should meet again when the final program is to be approved, specific speakers and resource persons agreed upon, and the type of groupings and methods of presentation determined.

The actual form of the meeting must be based upon purposes or objectives.

When the planning committee meets in its first session, a tentative program should be developed by soliciting ideas from members of the committee, reviewing suggestions from participants, and examining past experiences from similar meetings.

The next step is to take all these ideas and develop a format which will meet the goals of the organization, the needs of the participants, and the aspirations of the planners.

Don't Perpetuate Traditional Mistakes

Too often conferences are planned around tradition. In the case of an annual workshop on public relations, held for many years by the organization, it is easy to repeat the same type of groupings, changing only the speakers and other resource persons. This may meet the needs of the members of the organization who are asked to participate in the annual event. But if an evaluation of the effectiveness of this particular conference is not made annually, planners may simply be perpetuating the same traditional mistakes.

Many educational conferences and workshops rely too heavily on the lecture-listen theory of learning. The format of the meeting and the kinds of groupings used depend upon the nature and objectives of the meeting. And these change, usually, from meeting to meeting. So does the audience.

Selecting the Type of Meeting

Five basic forms of meetings for the consideration of the conference planning committee are:

1. *Conference*
   General sessions and face-to-face groups; rely on participation; usually used for planning, problem-solving, fact-finding.
2. *Workshop*
   General sessions and face-to-face groups; participants are the resources; usually used for training purposes.
3. *Institute*
   General sessions and face-to-face groups but the staff provides most of the resources; also used for training.
4. *Seminar*
   High degree of participation; usually face-to-face groups, but the leader is not just a content expert, he is a discussion leader; utilized with a group of experienced people who share experiences.
5. *Clinic*
   Usually face-to-face, but it may be a combination of general sessions and face-to-face groupings; a clinical exploration of some particular subject with participants being trained by clinic leaders.

Conferences, workshops, and institutes have a variety of possible groupings and planners must decide how to handle each part of the meeting. Here is a summary of the types of groupings available and how each may best be used:

Grouping	*Kinds of Subject Matter*	*Group or Number of Participants*
General sessions	Information giving Orientation Reporting to total group Voting Business meetings Demonstrations Speeches, lectures	Total conference group
Plenary sessions	General session with official action (business meeting, delegate assembly, etc.)	Total official group (voting members)
Work groups	Working on a problem or aspect of a problem, to come up with action, recommendation, or finding; report usually expected; may meet once or several times.	Usually not more than 10 or 20, to allow maximum participation; group composed heterogeneously from conference groups
Special interest groups	Composed around common interests of members or common back-home jobs; exchange of opinions, experiences, ideas; usually no action required although finding may be produced	10 to 20 to allow for maximum participation
Occupational groups	Special interest groups built around jobs of the members	
Application groups	Designed to apply new learnings or information received to other situations of members	To 15
Skill practice groups	Found in workshops and institutes, designed to give members practice opportunities in subject being studied (news writing, conference leadership, leadership training)	12 to 18
Training group or process group	Specialized form used in some human relations workshops, where subject is study of group process and behavior in groups	12 to 20
Off-the-record groups	Small groups designed to give participants opportunities to react to the conference; no reporting required, but may become informal channel to conference staff for gripes, suggestions; an official conference bull session	
Orientation groups	Small groups that meet once at beginning of conference for introduction and orientation	5 to 10

Once the planning committee has agreed upon the basic form of the meeting—conference, workshop, institute, seminar, or clinic—and the basic program has been determined, the next step is to analyze each session of the conference.

New information, new theory, policies and principles can be handled more effectively if presented before the total group of participants. Official actions, such as voting, election of officers, and committee reports, also require a general session. Featured speakers and introduction of important guests also belong in the general sessions of the conference.

But when the subject matter to be covered involves recommendations from the participants for a future course of action, or possible ways of handling a complex problem, conference planners must decide whether to schedule this in a general session with the entire group or to break the group into smaller groups where participants can take a more active part in the discussion.

Assuming that small groups are selected, planners then have to decide whether *work groups* or *special interest groups* are more appropriate.

The nature of the subject under discussion will dictate the type of small group meeting. For example, if you want independent reactions of teachers and administrators on internal communication problems, it would be wise to use special interest groups. If, however, you want to have both teachers and administrators share their views on this subject, and in small groups, work groups would probably be utilized in order to arrive at common agreement.

To Keynote or Not To Keynote

Once you decide what kind of material is desired, then analyze the situation in which it is to be presented. Many conferences begin with a keynote speech. This is fine—provided the participants are ready to listen. If they just arrived, have not been properly oriented, and are not yet "tuned in" on the subject matter of the conference, the keynote speech will rarely do the job it was meant to do.

Similarly, if a summary is presented at the end of a long, hard conference day, it may fall on deaf ears. The listener's ear can absorb only so much in one day. It might be wiser to allow participants to eat lunch on their own, rather than schedule a luncheon, complete with speaker, sandwiched in between lengthy morning and afternoon sessions.

Planners must consider the audience's attitude toward each subject, the fatigue factor, the relationship to other subjects on the program, the kinds of resources required, and the method of presentation chosen.

When you are scheduling the elements on the conference program, ask yourself these questions:

Where will this best fit into the program —morning? afternoon?

How interested is the audience in this subject?

How important is this subject to the organization? To the participants?

How does this tie in with the objectives of the meeting?

How familiar is the audience with this subject?

What is the participant's attitude toward the subject?

How much participation do you anticipate?

Would this be handled better in a general session or small group? Why?

If in small groups, should they be composed of participants from similar back-home situations or should each group be mixed? Why?

What kinds of resource persons or materials will be necessary for this subject? In general session? In small groups?

No One "Right" Way

There is no single "right" way to present any subject. The method of presentation

depends upon the *nature of the material* and the *situation in which it is being presented.*

For large, general session meetings, planners must determine which of several large-meeting presentation methods will be most effective.

For small, face-to-face groups, the decision about which method to use depends upon how much information needs to be presented by the chairman or resource person in relation to the discussion time of participants.

Methods of presentation to participants in general sessions include:

Speaker (unassisted, no visual aids)
Most appropriate for lecture, personal experience, inspirational, information-giving

Speaker with visuals
Describing technical subject, training, discussing complex subject, dealing with controversial matter

Demonstration
Demonstrating ideas, equipment, processes, a procedure

Situation demonstration
Demonstrating behavior (for example: leading a discussion, handling an interview)

Dramatic action
A skit or stunt designed to dramatize a point of view

Panel, symposium, debate, or forum
Presentation of different points of view on a subject. Panel has interaction among members. In a symposium, each person takes a part of the subject and talks to or through a chairman. The forum period is interaction with members of the audience.

Once you have determined the method of presentation for each part of the conference program, you must then determine the resource people required in each grouping. Resource persons include:

Speakers

Panel chairmen (for planning presentation as well as for program)

Panel members

Content or subject-matter resource persons (for small groups)

Discussion leaders

Recorders (to record small-group discussion)

Reporters (to report the discussion—this may be a job for recorders)

Group observers (where observation of the group's work is desired)

Session developers (to help create a particular session, program, or agenda)

Unit heads (in large training meetings: examples—coordinator of general sessions, coordinator of skill practice sessions, work group coordinator)

Section chairmen (for special interest meetings, may also be discussion leaders).

These are all resource people for the program itself. They do not include the staff who will handle registration or physical arrangements or hospitality. Conference planners should keep the two types of functions separated in their planning, even though frequently the same person may be involved in several functions in each category.

How to select guest speakers and how to get audience involvement are covered in separate chapters.

3. Physical Arrangements

We have devoted several pages to program planning.

Detailed suggestions have been offered on analyzing the needs of participants, establishing goals and objectives, developing the conference planning organization, and carrying out the details for planning all elements of the conference program.

But don't overlook another important part of conference preparation—planning and providing for necessary physical arrangements.

That includes accommodations for guests and participants (if the meeting is scheduled for more than one day), meeting rooms, special equipment which may be required, meal functions, and registration facilities.

It's the Little Things That Count!

A meeting room too small for the assigned group; a long, frustrating registration process; and lack of a chalkboard can easily detract from an otherwise interesting conference program.

Preparation for physical arrangements should begin early in the conference planning process. The person or committee in charge of facilities must, of course, work closely with the program committee as plans are developed for the conference.

If the conference is to be held in the same community where participants reside, the facilities committee can easily make the necessary physical preparations. But if the meeting is being held in an out-of-town location, planners should personally inspect the facilities offered and arrange for the type of accommodations desired. Whether the conference is held in a hotel, a public building, or on a university campus, planners should provide basic facts to the hotel management, local committee, or person assigned the responsibility of arranging for the necessary physical facilities.

When in Doubt, Write It Out

Provide your host with facts. Tell him what you need and what you can afford. Answer all his questions. To save time, before visiting the conference site to work out details, write down the basic requirements and send them to the person assigned to work with you on the conference facilities. Then go over these instructions with him when you arrive for a preconference planning visit.

If *overnight accommodations* are required, give the date the majority of the participants will be arriving and departing. Estimate the approximate number of rooms required. Establish an understanding about whether reservations are to be confirmed directly to the participants or cleared through a local housing chairman. Get the daily room rates for single, double, and twin reservations (are flat rates available for participants?), and obtain a guarantee that rooms will be provided to registrants at the rates confirmed to them. Provide information regarding the number of rooms which need to be set aside for officers, program participants, and special guests.

Spell out the requirements for *meeting rooms.* Indicate the seating capacity of each room required for a session on the conference program, for committees, for a conference office, press room, for exhibits, meal functions, and receptions. Then indicate what special equipment or facilities will be required for the conference. If possible, get floor plans of the rooms suggested for your conference, complete with dimensions and location (on which floor? in what building?). Find out whether there are pillars that obstruct the view.

Plan how each room is to be used during the conference. Determine the setup desired for tables, chairs, and stage. For each session of the meeting, itemize the specific requirements for that room (public address facilities? lectern with reading light? chalkboard? easel? ash trays? water pitcher and glasses? projector?). Make one assumption at this point—assume you will need a chalkboard (complete with eraser and chalk) for every meeting room and general session of the conference. Ask the local person in charge of these facilities to indicate which of these requirements he can and cannot provide. This will prevent possible misunderstandings and will indicate which equipment conference planners should bring with them.

Remember that it will be necessary for you to provide the hotel with a written list of meeting room requirements, including the setting up and equipment, for each day of the conference.

For *meal functions* during the conference, estimate the number of people to be served, and determine the cost per person (including tax and gratuity) and the menu. Find out when you must make your final guarantee and when payment must be made for the function. Provide the number of persons to be seated at the head table and suggest a room setup. If your committee wants decorations for the tables, notify the caterer so he can be prepared. Decide whether meal tickets are to be taken at the door or at the table, whether a public address system or a lectern is required, and the exact serving time.

Some of the larger hotels or city convention bureaus provide essential registration service, including the necessary personnel and equipment. This service may not be free, however. If your meeting will be held in a hotel, check this fact with the convention manager or sales manager. Some university extension centers also assist with the conference registration process. You will need tables, chairs, signs, typewriters, cash boxes, and supplies for even a small conference registration.

The registration desk is the participant's first contact with the conference. If he must stand in line for an unreasonably long time, face a grouchy or indifferent registrar, or fumble through an unorganized registration process, he may lose interest in or decide to forego the conference. If he has preregistered and paid in advance, he should need only to walk to a separate desk, pick up his badge, conference program, and materials, and be on his way. Even in large conventions, new registrants should not have to experience an unusually long wait in a registration line.

The registration committee should work out the details of this process and do a thorough job of briefing the personnel who will staff the registration desks. Here are some basic suggestions:

- Set up a simple registration procedure. Don't give one person too many functions to perform. Three-member registration teams seem to function best. One person receives the completed registration card from the participant, checks it for accuracy, and hands it to the second person so that a badge can be prepared. While the badge is being typed or printed (preprinted badges are best, of course), the first person collects the fee from the participant and issues a receipt. The second person places the participant's registration card in an alphabetical file and hands the completed badge to the participant. The third person in the registration process hands to the participant all conference materials (kit, list of participants, program, etc.).
- Prepare in advance all kits for participants, badges for guests and resource people, and badges for advance registrants.
- Preregister as many participants as possible before the conference begins. Then provide a separate registration table for those preregistered.
- Have an information desk at the registration area.
- In a large conference with many participants, set up three registration teams of three persons each, for participants

whose last name begins with A-F, G-M, N-Z.

- Provide enough change for the cashiers.
- Have large, clear signs and simple instructions conveniently posted.
- Provide an adequate supply of pencils, desks separate from the registration tables where participants can fill out their registration cards, and plenty of wastebaskets.
- Provide for relief of registration team members for meals, and for participants who wish to register after the desk has closed.
- Determine a policy on refunds and on accepting checks.
- If possible, have someone with authority serving as a trouble shooter, available to determine what must be done when unexpected questions arise.

Remember that no one example of a registration process will fit all conferences. Equally important is to remember to provide adequate staff to man the entire registration process.

If you plan *exhibits* at the conference, a separate committee should be established to coordinate them and to establish the necessary policies. The committee will have to recruit the exhibitors, arrange for space and develop the exhibit layout plan, determine the hours the exhibits will be open, and establish the fees and budget for this part of the conference. Adequate space must be provided at the conference site and the details worked out with the building management.

The exhibits room should be reserved to allow time both for setting up and for dismantling. A floor plan should be agreed upon, electric circuits checked (volts, cycle, phase, ample lighting, outlets), and a standby electrician or engineer assistance provided. Find out where exhibitors are to ship their materials and equipment, and when, and how they will be stored. Most exhibitors of large displays also want to be assured that the exhibit hall will be locked when not in use and that proper security insurance and precautions are taken.

Commercial exhibits involve many additional problems. There is usually a considerable fee for space to be rented for exhibits. Other costs, including additional staff assistance, will be a sizable budget factor. In addition, the determination must be made concerning whether commercial exhibits are appropriate to the conference being planned.

Other *miscellaneous services* may need to be provided for many conferences. A hospitality desk could help with housing arrangements, sight-seeing, social affairs, or shopping suggestions for wives or husbands of participants. It's a good idea, soon after the conference opens, to provide each participant with a list of all registrants, complete with names, titles, and addresses. This can be compiled from the alphabetized cards at the registration desk. Adequate signs need to be prepared to assure a smooth conference operation (with plenty of masking tape available for last-minute chores).

In fact, a regular checklist of all facilities and arrangements should be prepared by conference planners to assure the necessary attention to details.

Both the program *and the arrangements* must meet the needs of conference participants if the meeting is to be a success.

4. Speakers

There is more to engaging a guest speaker than listening to his talk. Finding the right speaker for your conference, particularly for the first general session, may spell the success or failure of the entire program. The planning committee has a responsibility to participants to provide topnotch speakers and a quality program, realizing that every listener has a right to expect of a speaker two things: useful goods, and the ability to deliver those goods.

Too often guest speakers are selected on the basis of only one of the above requirements. Finding the right speaker is not easy, but planners must insist that they find not only a person who combines knowledge of the subject matter but one who also is skilled in public speaking.

Planning committees sometimes disappoint an audience by arranging for a speaker solely because he has a "name." To avoid this temptation, make a thorough investigation of several persons. Talk with persons who have heard the speaker under consideration. Did he hold the audience's attention and interest? Did he read from a manuscript or speak from notes? Can he work well in two-way discussion in a smaller group? Did he enjoy his speaking assignment?

One person on the program committee should be appointed to secure speakers and other resource people needed for the conference. And, most important, the speaker and the host should have a complete understanding of all arrangements.

Speakers should be given all the basic information about the meeting at the outset and right up to actual speaking time. The same holds true for panel chairmen. Give these persons such information as:

- Time, date, and place of meeting
- Nature and purpose of the meeting
- Who and how many people will be there
- The nature of the sponsoring organization
- The subject he is to cover, and why
- Length of his presentation, and what follows it
- When he should arrive and what time he is to speak
- Common interests of the audience
- What the planning committee hopes will come from his presentation
- Why is he considered an appropriate person for this job?
- Agreement on fee or honorarium and expenses.

Planners need certain information from the speaker, too. He should be asked to provide such things as:

- Name, title, and present profession
- Title and length of his talk
- Biographical and background information that qualifies him to talk on this subject
- His travel arrangements (Is his wife to accompany him?)
- Should someone meet him at the airport or train station?
- His photograph, if needed for press and/or printed publicity.

After making initial arrangements with the speaker, remember to send a follow-up letter prior to the conference, which might include:

- A reminder of time, date, and place of the meeting
- Transportation and housing arrangements
- Directions to location of the meeting, or information about who will meet him, at what time, and where
- A copy of the program
- Report on advance attendance, if possible
- Inquiry about any audiovisual equipment, other aids, or special setup
- Request a copy of his manuscript, if any, for the press.

When a panel chairman is contacted, make sure you send him the names and addresses of panel members and specific information about pre-meeting briefing sessions.

Unless the out-of-town speaker specifically requests that he not be met upon his arrival in the conference city, assign someone to meet him at the airport or train terminal to escort him to the hotel and, later, from the hotel to the meeting.

Make sure the speaker's hotel reservation has been verified by a designated member of the program committee. Notify the hotel when the guest is expected and make sure his reservation is protected.

It would be embarrassing to learn later that the speaker endured poor facilities—or didn't have a room. One speaker reports arriving at a motel to learn that his reservation was not verified by the local planning committee. The motel had no vacancies so he and his wife spent half the evening trying to locate another room. They finally stayed in the only quarters available—an unused meeting room in a second-rate hotel many miles from the scene of the conference.

In some cases, it might be a good idea to make a hotel reservation for your speaker even if he does not plan to stay overnight. He may appreciate having a quiet room in which to make last-minute changes in his speech or to rest after traveling.

When he arrives in town, ask him what he would like to do before he is scheduled to appear on the program. Some speakers may want to rest and relax after a long trip. Others plan to work on their speech. Or he may appreciate having someone show him the highlights and interesting parts of the community or conference location. But don't rush him through a capsule tour of your school building the moment he arrives. Let the speaker decide what he would like to do before he appears on the program.

The one thing he undoubtedly would like to see, however, is the meeting room in which he is scheduled to speak. He may want to try out the public address system or suggest a rostrum, if one has not been provided. At least let him get the "feel" of the room beforehand.

Allow time for a last-minute briefing with the speaker before he appears on the program. You can usually conduct such a briefing during breakfast or lunch. Bring him up to date on (1) the actual attendance and composition of the audience, (2) how the conference or workshop is going, (3) anything that has happened which might affect his presentation, such as questions which have already been raised or problems he may wish to refer to, (4) whether questions from the audience will follow his speech and how they will be handled, (5) who will introduce him, and who will be on the platform with him, (6) a review of the specific timing and content of the program, (7) information about any meeting aids which he requested, such as a chalkboard, easel, overhead projector, etc., and (8) any new problem the speaker may have.

After the speech, provide the same hospitality which was extended before the speech. If it is necessary for the speaker to leave immediately to make travel connections, the chairman should explain this to the audience. Have his check ready for him, if possible, but be discreet when presenting it. If you are paying his expenses, assure him you will reimburse him immediately upon

receiving a note listing his expenses. Or give him the necessary forms for reimbursement of travel expenses. Help pack any charts or other equipment he may have brought along. Offer to take him to the airport or terminal. And, finally, thank him.

If the speaker is remaining overnight, he is entitled to expect the hospitality of at least one member of the planning committee unless he indicates he wants privacy. Good judgment is essential—it is easy to swamp the guest with attention.

Immediately after the conference, write a note of appreciation to the speaker. Tell him how you appreciated the speech and include any favorable comments received from members of the audience. Send clippings or follow-up reports from the meeting to him. And take time to carefully evaluate the job the speaker has done. This will help in the selection of future speakers for similar meetings.

And, finally, some "don'ts" about how to treat speakers:

Don't give the speech for him when the speaker is introduced. Follow this simple, four-step outline as a guide for the introduction:

- Refer to the occasion—the conference objectives, this particular session.
- Briefly discuss those elements of the speaker's training and experience which qualify him to speak on this subject.
- The title or description of the subject of his speech.
- Last, but not least—give his title and full name (in that order).

The job of the introduction is to make the audience want to hear the speaker. After the introduction, only three things need to happen: the chairman sits, the speaker rises, the audience applauds.

Don't use the words "pinch hitter" or "substitute" even if the speaker is a last-minute replacement. These words indicate someone of less importance or significance than the original speaker.

Don't give a lady a corsage. It may clash with her dress, get in the way, and be an embarrassing nuisance. If you wish to present flowers, give her the kind she may take with her or have them placed in her room.

Don't leave the speaker standing alone on the platform or at a dinner table full of empty dishes.

5. Other Program Participants

Deciding on the conference program, hiring a hall, and arranging for guest speakers is not enough.

Warm Them Up

If plans for small, face-to-face discussion groups involve nothing more than assigning 10 to 15 people to a table for "discussion," the results may be extremely disappointing.

Conference planners should include in the conference preparation *adequate briefing* not only for speakers but also for every other program participant. This includes members of panels or symposiums, discussion leaders, recorders, and resource people.

Getting the guest speaker into the room where he will speak in advance of the session so he can become familiar with the setting was suggested earlier. This same advice holds true for *any other program participant in a general session* of the conference.

Do this far enough in advance of the session so that each person who is scheduled for that part of the program can actually stand on the platform, behind the rostrum, and in front of the microphone. Simply ask them to cooperate in a test of the public address facilities. This not only lets them get the "feel" of the situation but also prevents a possible last-minute discovery (when the panelists are being introduced) that the microphone has not been connected, or that the electrical current in that particular room has not been turned on, or that people in the back of the room can't hear one of the members of the panel.

If projection equipment is going to be used in a general session, have it in position, focused, and ready to begin on the signal from the chairman or speaker. It takes but a few minutes to save the audience from sitting through the warmup antics of a disgruntled, last-minute, projector operator. Have someone assigned to and stationed by the room's light switches, to prevent the last-minute scurrying around the room looking for the master light switch.

Rehearse a Panel, Symposium, or Demonstration Group

Set up the panel table, place the panel members' name signs in position, and ask panelists to sit where they are actually to sit during the program. This permits proper balancing of public address microphones and allows for last-minute checks on placement so that members of the audience can see and hear every panelist.

It is good sense to allow time for the panel chairman to meet with his panelists before the program begins. In this way they can review their assignment, decide the order of speaking, and determine whether to refer to each other by first names or formal titles. A "dry run" for a panel gives the members a chance to get acquainted with each other, avoids duplication of ideas which individual panelists may have prepared, and allows the panel the opportunity to get used to thinking and talking together before the actual session begins.

Brief the Discussion Leaders, Too

The main reason conference participants are scheduled in small, face-to-face groups is to promote greater involvement and participation.

Effective discussion meetings don't just happen, however. They are organized situa-

tions, created for a specific purpose, and involving specific people who cooperatively work together on a specific subject or problem. Discussion groups are, in reality, organizations for communication.

The success of small group discussion depends on the skill of the discussion leader and on the motivation of the participants involved.

Discussion leaders should be carefully selected by the program committee and carefully briefed. Ideally, those selected to serve in this important role at a conference are experienced at it. But, regardless of their experience, conference discussion leaders need to be reminded of their importance, their functions and objectives, and the possible "traps" to be avoided.

Discussion leaders are not instructors, but they must serve as constructive guides who have the obligation of helping each person in the group do his own thinking.

Basically, their leadership task requires:

- That the purpose of the discussion will be achieved.
- That group members will be satisfied with the leadership.
- That group members will feel satisfaction with their experiences in the discussion.

Discussion leaders have their work cut out for them if those goals are to be achieved. If possible, obtain the assistance of a person skilled at conference discussion techniques who can be in charge of briefing and working with discussion leaders in order to:

Try to get general participation.

Develop cohesiveness of the group.

Obtain the essential information needed for the discussion.

Encourage opinion- or solution-giving.

Halt the irrelevant contributions.

Clarify contributions and summarize results.

Remain personally neutral.

Get the main phases of the problem under discussion considered.

Conference planners should help discussion leaders be realistic about how much their groups can do in the time allowed. A briefing session for all the conference discussion leaders could cover such techniques as (1) how to get the group started, (2) how to avoid assuming too much authority and how to get general participation, (3) how to prepare an organizational outline, a "track to run on," (4) how to handle the discussion monopolizer, and (5) how to resolve conflict.

A discussion leader is a part of the discussion and, at the same time, an observer surveying it from a distance. One of the most important purposes of a briefing session for discussion leaders is to get them to participate in the planning of the conference operation. Here again, the emphasis is placed on the participants, not on the program personnel.

An equally difficult job is to spell out the duties of the subject-matter or content *resource people*. The chief difficulty in this role is to avoid letting the group become too dependent on the "experts." Yet, these special resource people can help the group come to better solutions.

Too many times the resource person is asked to serve as the discussion leader of small conference groups. Those two hats are difficult to wear for even the most experienced "expert." Probably these functions should be separated into two different tasks, assigned to two different individuals.

Resource people should also be briefed before the conference begins. They should be asked to avoid making a formal presentation unless some special technical or background information is needed. Remind them that the less they act as an expert, the more effective they will be. For example, in a group discussion of staff communication problems, a resource person skilled in communications avoided supplying his opinion by asking a question, "Have we thought how classroom teachers might react to this suggestion?" That provoked discussion by participants who found the answer to their own question. Injecting a personal point of view is sometimes

the automatic response of a person in a resource role, but it often stifles discussion.

An overlooked assignment at most conferences is that of the discussion *recorder*. This is casually assigned to an individual who is supposed to "take notes" on the group's discussion for a report to the entire conference during a closing general session, or for a final printed summary of the conference. It is usually viewed as a dull, unimportant task, often made difficult by an ill-prepared, unorganized discussion leader.

Recorders should be included in the briefing of conference personnel and reminded that theirs is, actually, a leadership role. They need to be told that the records of the decisions reached by each discussion group are a major resource of the conference. Theirs is a valuable role, both to the group and to the discussion leader, for they alone can supply "on the spot" summaries.

Conference planners can be a big help to recorders by supplying them with uniform reporting forms. These identify the session, leader's name, and recorder's name, and often have columns labeled "agreement and decisions," "conflicting ideas," and even "bright ideas."

Some conference directors brief the discussion leaders, resource persons, and recorders together during one preconference session. This technique may help each person better understand his own role and those of his fellow program participants. (It also seems to add status to the role of the recorder.)

The concept of organizing small conference discussion groups around a "leadership team" is replacing a former system of letting a discussion leader run the entire show. Under this team approach, each member of the team (discussion leader, recorder, and resource person) has a separate function to perform, but shares the responsibility for a productive discussion.

Briefing these leadership teams can be accomplished in as little as an hour, or elaborated into a full-day briefing session. The extent of the session depends upon the number of persons to be briefed, the complexity of the conference, the previous experience and skill of the leaders.

The briefing session can be called a "leadership planning institute" or "leadership briefing session" in which discussion leaders, recorders, resource persons, and sometimes observers plan the operation of the work groups or special interest groups of the conference. It can be easily scheduled for a local conference involving staff members. In a more complex regional or national conference, leadership teams can be asked to report for the "institute" one-half day before the conference begins.

Organize and Train the Staff, Too

Although the conference or workshop may be staffed by members of the school district's staff or members of the organization sponsoring the meeting, don't overlook the fact that a new and unique organization must be set up for each conference or workshop.

Just as speakers and other resource people must be trained or briefed, so must the conference administrative staff be trained if the meeting is to operate smoothly and meet the objectives established.

The conference staff should meet together for a review and explanation of each member's role in the coming meeting. The conference director can then explain the purposes and objectives of the conference, discuss the schedule, and go over the conference program and necessary details. This may be accomplished at a staff breakfast or luncheon. Individuals who have responsibilities for particular elements in the conference can meet with their own staff for final briefing.

Another useful purpose in a conference staff briefing is the opportunity to "dry run" the registration procedure by preregistering all the staff people. This enables the registration committee to work out the kinks in that process well ahead of the arrival of the first conference participants.

6. Audience Involvement

Put youself in the participant's shoes when he first arrives at the conference.

He registers (hopefully with ease), receives his conference program and kit of participant's materials, looks for someone he knows, and heads for the opening session.

Watch That Crucial Opening Session

A keynote speaker is usually first on the agenda, talks for at least half an hour, and is followed by the chairman's statement: "Let's have questions from the audience." Usually a long, embarrassing silence follows.

Why? In the first place, participants simply aren't ready to plunge into discussion so early in the conference.

Before the typical conference participant starts to take part in the question-and-answer discussions, he needs to become involved and identified with the conference group. He wants to feel comfortable before he begins to contribute.

First of all, he has some questions which should be answered:

1. *Who is who?* Who are the other participants? Who are these people who are listed on the program? How do the participants compare in terms of background, on-the-job skills, and experience?
2. *Where do I fit in?* What's expected of me? How am I supposed to participate? How much am I expected to contribute? Do I just sit and listen or am I expected to talk?
3. *What's the purpose of this conference?* What are the goals and objectives of this meeting? Who designed the program? What are we expected to accomplish?
4. *Who's in charge?* Who is running this meeting? What kind of person is he? How did he get the job?
5. *What is the content of this meeting?* Although a printed program is provided, what explanation is there for the subject matter to be discussed? What are the ground rules? Will reports be published?

In short, the participant needs to feel at ease and a part of the conference program. He wants to know how he fits into the group and to what extent he can or is expected to participate. He needs some orientation to the conference before the actual content material begins. If his questions are answered, even through a quick orientation period at the opening session, he may participate more readily. If his questions are not answered, he may never actively participate in the meeting.

Watch That Question-and-Answer Period

Why do question-and-answer periods usually flop? There are several reasons.

Time is one factor. The question-and-answer period is usually tacked onto the end of a speech or at the end of the meeting, "so the audience can participate," because "it's the thing to do at conferences." Often it is the artificial cushion for a speech which ended too soon or the "pad" until the next speaker arrives.

Leland P. Bradford, director of the National Education Association's National Training Laboratories, offers three reasons

for the failure of most question-and-answer periods:

1. The problem of communication.
2. The problem of putting information to work.
3. The problem of collecting information to use in planning future meetings.

Bradford points out that the speaker himself may be one of the reasons a question-and-answer period is a flop.

A speaker can never assume that people are anxious to hear what he has to say. Some members of the audience may resent his looks, or his voice, his position, or the organization he represents. His speech may have been dull and uninteresting. Or the audience may be unfriendly because the previous speaker was boring or the day exhausting.

There are four major obstacles to Bradford's first concern, communication, which the speaker must overcome:

1. The listener's logic may not be the speaker's logic. What makes sense to one person may not make sense to another.
2. The speaker may be talking over the heads of his listeners, or talking "down" to them.
3. No one remembers everything. We attend to that which we wish to attend to, and interpret what we see and hear in terms of our own interests and experiences.
4. All those in the audience will not absorb information at the same rate. Some listeners will be frustrated if they get too much too fast, or become bored if they get too little too slowly.

A second reason why question-and-answer periods fail is the problem of using information. It's quite an accomplishment to have information understood, but there are even more obstacles to be hurdled before information will be *used*.

There is also a big difference between listening and thinking. The question-and-answer period can put new information to work, however, and can make thinkers out of listeners, *if the speaker has done his job adequately*.

Bradford cites eight things the question-and-answer period can do to help get information used:

1. Check whether the information was understood and remembered.
2. Correct misunderstandings and misconceptions.
3. Uncover gaps in knowledge that need filling in.
4. Discover some of the resistances of members of the audience.
5. Test the extent to which listeners have related the information to their needs.
6. Give participants a chance to discuss, and thus begin to use, the new information.
7. Provide an opportunity to reemphasize main points, and to summarize again.
8. Indicate the kind of further help, if any, the audience will need to use the information.

The third problem: Question-and-answer periods are overlooked by conference planners in gathering information for future meetings.

Analysis of the questions asked and reactions of the audience is a valuable guide to planners, both in evaluation of the present conference and in planning another meeting. Several questions raised about a single topic might suggest a topic of interest for a future meeting. Questions also indicate the feelings of an audience. They reveal the background and understanding the audience has on a particular subject, as well as areas of special interest, hostility, prejudice, apathy, and ignorance.

Most question-and-answer periods achieve only a small fraction of what was sought by conference planners and what could be accomplished. Bradford suggests that the full potential of this audience in-

volvement technique could be reached if these factors are considered:

The question-and-answer period should be a fundamental part of the entire meeting, not just an afterthought.

It should be tied in with the whole meeting, not just tacked on at the end.

It should help tie up loose ends, summarize, and clarify any issues that still remain.

It should help the members of the audience see how to use what they have just learned.

It should reveal to conference planners just how much of the program really got across, reveal the interests and reactions of the audience, and provide clues to planning future meetings.

How can you plan effective question periods?

There are three basic steps in this vital part of the conference planning process:

STEP ONE: *Get the audience ready to ask questions.* Prepare them for this step at the beginning of the conference. Assure them that everyone in this conference group asks questions. Make them feel comfortable about raising questions and make it easy for them. You can do this if you (1) provide *sample questions* before the speaker begins, questions which may stimulate other questions, (2) *brief the audience* on the purpose of the meeting and what to listen for at this point of the program; (3) provide a suggestive *outline* of some of the most important points to be covered by the speaker (these can be mimeographed or written on a chalkboard); (4) divide the audience into *listening teams* before the talk; those on the right side of the room form one team, those in the center another team, and those on the left a third team and each team listens for a particular point in the speech; and (5) try *role-playing,* to bring out certain areas in which the group is interested, the problems and issues listeners feel are important, and the questions they want answered.

STEP TWO: *Get the questions down while they're hot.* Chairmen of conference sessions make a big mistake when they say, "You don't need to take any notes. After the meeting you will receive a copy of what has been said." Or worse still, a copy of the speech is distributed to every member of the audience before the speech. The theory of this procedure is that it is supposed to free the mind of the listener to concentrate on what is being said. Telling an audience not to take notes rarely results in greater attentiveness, and rarely do listeners reread a speech transcript after the conference is over. Questions that occur to listeners in the early part of a speech are usually forgotten by the end of the speech and important points are missed.

When listeners take notes they become involved, so do everything possible to encourage note taking. Provide notebooks or cards (and pencils). Ask speakers using visual materials to allow listeners time to jot down illustrated points. Questions jotted down on cards can be collected and quickly sorted so they can be systematically answered and anonymously asked.

Even if you intend to give out copies of the speech later, keep it a secret. The audience is more likely to refer back to its own notes and remember that information to a greater degree. As one wag suggested, when listeners take notes, they take note!

STEP THREE: *Help the audience get the most important questions.* Too often the question-and-answer period produces irrelevant or unimportant questions that are not representative of the interests and concerns of the total group. Conference planners can help avoid this problem by utilizing different techniques:

Buzz groups can be formed by dividing the audience into groups of 6 to 10 persons for a limited time of about 10 minutes. Ask them to form small circles with their chairs, or ask people in part of one row to turn around and talk with those directly behind them. Ask each group to select someone to serve as a recorder to report their conclu-

sions or major questions to the audience and the speaker.

The *"Phillips 66"* method, developed by Donald Phillips of Michigan State University, can be utilized. Here, three persons from each two rows face each other to form groups of six, then are given six minutes to decide on a question for the speaker or to form an opinion.

The *"Conpar"* method, developed by Charles F. Moran of General Motors Corporation, can be used if both speakers and audience members are familiar with the technique. This is a rigidly timed technique which works very well in a workshop session of about 2½ hours. (An outline of this technique is provided on pages 69-72.)

Interview panels from the audience can be used to ask questions of the speaker or panel of experts. These panel members are chosen before the speech to represent the various back-home interests of the audience, such as people from small, medium, and large-size school districts. Their questions represent the point of view of their own counterparts in the audience and may help to spur the question-and-answer period.

Reaction panels can also be utilized (with permission of the speaker) throughout the speech, rather than only at the end of the presentation. A similarly representative group from the audience is asked to present questions at any time during the presentation. Here again, the questions should be those of the group which they represent, not their own personal questions. As an alternative, these reactions can be obtained at the end of the speech, listed on the chalkboard to indicate the range of questions from the group, and then the speaker responds. This technique allows the chairman to categorize questions for ease in obtaining answers from the speaker.

A general session might include an *audience-speaker panel,* composed of the speaker and a few members of the audience. This adds to the sense of audience participation and may result in a more thorough treatment of major questions.

Interviews are frequently more effective than asking speakers to reply to questions in an off-the-cuff manner. The speaker (or panel of speakers) can sit on one side of the platform with one, two, or three interviewers seated on the other. Using questions collected from the audience (from the cards which were distributed prior to the speech), panel members feed questions to the speaker. Interviewers can ask the speaker precise questions and perhaps obtain a more thorough discussion through this type of follow-up. It also forces the speaker to get to the point when answering questions from the audience.

Storing questions may be necessary, since all questions cannot or should not be answered in one meeting. Some questions might be answered better at another point on the conference program, when that particular topic is scheduled for discussion. Unanswered questions can be written on the chalkboard or on large sheets of paper on an easel and made a part of the next session. Members of the audience then know that they haven't been ignored.

Conference planners can learn from the question period, too.

They can observe the extent of communication from the platform to the audience; whether members of the audience were making an effort to apply what they heard; the attitude of the audience toward the speaker, and whether the session served the needs and interests of the audience. Through careful analysis, planners can improve future meetings by learning how to achieve greater involvement and participation from the participants. They are the ones the conference was organized to serve.

Many of the suggestions described in this chapter originally appeared in the July-August 1952 issue of *Adult Leadership.*

7. Promotion

It would be disappointing, to say the least, after hours of careful planning, to stage an interesting conference to a room only half filled with participants.

That can happen—and does—if the conference planners don't do a first-class job of promotion to attract participants to the meeting.

Where Is Everybody?

It isn't much of a problem if the superintendent decides to call a public relations meeting for all his building principals. The job of the promotion committee chairman in this situation is relatively simple, for he can be fairly certain all the participants will be there.

If your conference is not one that requires compulsory attendance, however, you have work to do. Too many well-planned conferences fail to draw the anticipated number of participants because planners neglect to make the advance information as clear, attractive, and interesting as the program is to be.

It is not unusual for a potential conference participant to learn about the meeting almost at the last moment, with the sole piece of information mimeographed on a simple sheet of 8½″ x 11″ paper. Even if previous conferences on this subject or sponsored by this organization have been good ones, you still have to let the participants know that there are good reasons to be as interested in the upcoming program as they were in the previous meetings.

Some PR for Publicists

Suggestion number one in the publicity department: Select a promotion chairman who has had some experience. Organize the promotional effort just as carefully as you have organized all the other elements of the conference. Assign the task to two or three people who can execute all the many responsibilities involved in preconference promotion. If necessary, build a promotion committee around that experienced chairman so he has enough help to do the job properly.

Some of the poorest promotional efforts have shown up in attempts to attract participants to a conference on public relations. This, it seems, is one conference where a full-scale PR effort would be expected in advance efforts to lure participants.

So let's borrow some of the techniques we advocate to others and use them to fill the chairs at our own conference or workshop on public relations.

Earlier we suggested that you get information from potential participants during the preconference fact-finding stage of building the program. Promotional planning can be blended easily with these efforts to orient participants to the coming conference. Sampling opinions of participants, through questionnaires or interviews prior to the conference, is an excellent method of making the first announcement of the meeting. The written questionnaire sent out by the program planning committee could be accompanied by a promotion fiyer announcing the conference. It serves as the initial contact in a preconference mailing to participants.

Be Audience Oriented, Not Message Oriented

The chairman of the conference promotion committee has three main jobs: to work closely with the conference chairman on attendance problems, to develop materials which will be sent to potential conference participants, and to prepare the final, printed conference program.

He, too, must be vitally concerned with the needs, feelings, problems, and interests of the persons who will be attending the meeting. The first reaction of a potential participant to the conference announcement he receives in the mail will be: "What's in this for me?" Consequently, the first announcement should answer that question—or at least begin to answer it.

What is "in it" for the participant? How is the program designed to meet his needs? What can he hope to gain by attending this meeting? How will it benefit him, personally and on the job? Why is this particular meeting better than other conferences he could attend? Is there anything different, unusual, exciting in the works at this meeting? Who is coming—people in job capacities similar to his own?

These and related questions must be anticipated and discussed by the conference promotion committee as it prepares the battery of mail announcements. Imagination and creativity are needed to make the printed announcements stand out from the usual barrage of messages received by the typical participant. He will pay attention to that which he wishes to attend to, to that which attracts and holds his interest.

It costs very little more to use colored paper stock or colored ink in printing a conference announcement. It will be more attractive, cost about the same, yet stand out much better than the typical, dull piece of plain white paper with too much information crammed on both sides.

Spruce up your announcement with some good art or illustrations. Ask your printer for ideas and advice; he probably has a clip book full of illustrations which could be reproduced easily for your conference announcement.

When the promotion committee prepares copy for the conference mail announcement, remind the members to write with the reader in mind. Answer the reader's questions. Supply the answers to the five W's of the newsman: who, what, where, why, and when. Make sure he knows how to get to the conference, how much it will cost, and why he can't afford to miss it.

Here's another suggestion. If the conference planning committee consists of individuals who represent the general membership of the organization, and who are respected by the members of that organization, ask them to send a personal letter encouraging conference attendance to the persons who they feel should be potential participants. There's nothing like the personal touch to get results.

An even stronger suggestion is to organize the personal approach. Names of potential participants are divided among members of a committee and telephone calls are made urging attendance at the conference. This is quite a task for a large conference, but is very effective when utilized with a smaller organization or staff.

The promotion committee has a job which demands imagination, persuasion, and public relations—with the conference's most important public, the participants.

Don't Forget the Mass Media

The promotion committee has other "publics" which need information about the upcoming conference: Newspapers and radio and television stations should be included in the conference publicity timetable.

Newsmen are interested in news about people. They may not be as enthusiastic as you are about the conference or about the organization sponsoring the meeting, but they will be interested in the people from their area who will attend or who will be on the program.

If the program is of broad interest the public might be interested and so would

the newspaper. A "name" speaker on the program will be of interest to an editor, especially if the speaker is going to discuss a topic that is currently popular, controversial, or a public concern.

When a conference news release is prepared, make sure those same five W's are answered:

Who will be attending? Who is on the program? Who will be affected by the meeting? Who planned the meeting? Who is sponsoring the meeting?

What is the conference all about? What is the topic? What is the purpose of the meeting? What is unusual about the meeting?

Why is this meeting being held?

When is the time and date of the meeting?

Where will the meeting be held?

Supply the correct names and titles of all speakers, names of local people who will participate, and any details about the part to be played by any local organization in the conference. In other words, localize your conference for the editor. Suggest to radio and television staffs that some of the top speakers can be available for interviews or kinescopes.

Don't forget the weekly newspapers. They are almost always understaffed and appreciate a release that can be printed as it is received. They are usually very sensitive to the hope that they will be able to print the story at about the same time it appears in the nearby daily newspaper, not several weeks after it appears in the daily.

Send releases to all news media simultaneously so as not to favor any one. When the printed conference program is prepared, be sure to send a copy to the news editors so they may search it for news possibilities.

The promotion committee may also decide to prepare standard hometown news releases which each participant can send back to his local newspaper when he arrives in the conference city. This form should be prepared in advance, complete with envelope, so the participant can add his own personal information, address it to his hometown newspaper, and mail it on the opening day of the conference.

8. School Public Relations Conferences

This part of your *Conference Planner* is designed to offer some suggestions for basic kinds of school public relations conferences, aimed at different audiences (who have varying needs and interests). These are merely *suggested* formats for various types of school public relations conferences. What fits one school district may not fit another. What works in one state association might not be appropriate for another similar organization.

School public relations conference formats are suggested in this chapter for (1) classroom teachers, (2) school administrators, (3) school PR specialists, and (4) school board members.

There Is No Magic Formula

Like any other conference, a workshop on school public relations is a way to communicate—and nothing more. Specifically, it is designed to explore ideas, impart information, or offer solutions in the complex field of public relations.

There is no "right" way to stage a conference or workshop on public relations. It depends upon the specific purpose for which the meeting is designed, the objectives of that particular meeting, and the participants for whom the conference is intended. The method of presentation will depend upon the nature of the material to be covered and the situation in which it is to be presented.

Don't Cover the Waterfront

Restrict the scope of your conference on school public relations.

Don't try to cover the public relations waterfront in a single meeting, regardless of the specific audience for whom the conference is intended. Too many public relations workshops offer a wide variety of suggestions in such areas as press relations, speakers bureaus, publications, audiovisual and other specific techniques, each of which could and probably should form the program content of a meeting in itself.

Be realistic about the content of your workshop. Don't try to cover everything there is to know about a school district's PR program in an hour or two. The generalities will satisfy no one.

For example, a group of classroom teachers attending a public relations conference were instructed to attend a table seminar on "one or more" of the following topics: internal relations, school board relations, American Education Week, Teaching Career Month, radio, newsletters, press relations, student relations, PR tips, photography, speakers bureau, and bulletin boards! They had exactly one hour to move from table to table to "pick up some handy ideas." The only thing accomplished in that hour was that a dozen different resource people, seated at each of the tables, were kept very busy stating their opinions over and over again to a constantly changing audience.

What is offered in the way of content at a conference on school public relations should be determined by *who* will attend and *why* they are coming.

The more carefully you define the "publics" of your workshop or conference, the more ways you will discover of interesting and influencing them.

For example, here's the story of a local school district which planned a staff confer-

ence on school public relations. The district served 14,000 children in 30 school buildings and with 700 teachers.

The stated long-range objective of the conference: to improve the school district's public relations program.

A conference planning committee, composed of classroom teachers, members of the public relations committee (one in each school), supervisors, and administrators, agreed that the district had four major problems in public relations:

1. Lack of a definite public relations policy by the board of education.
2. Few classroom teachers realized that the teacher was the district's most important public relations agent.
3. Poor internal communication within the school district.
4. PR committee members did not know how to communicate with newsmen who contacted them for information.

Planners decided that each of these problems could require a conference in itself in order to communicate effectively with the people in the problem areas. The four different "publics" involved: classroom teachers, administrators, public relations specialists (the committee members), and members of the school board. A chart showing the differences in objectives and program content revealed four different program designs, although all could be scheduled together at a joint school district conference.

Participants	*Short-term objectives*	*Conference purpose*	*Type of meeting*
Classroom teachers	"What Is the Role of the Teacher in School-Community Relationships?"	Fact-finding	Conference
Administrators	"How Can We Improve Our Internal Communication?"	Problem-solving	Workshop
PR committee	"How Do We Work with Press and Radio?"	Training	Clinic
Board members	"Development of a Public Relations Policy"	Planning	Conference

Conference planners decided upon the first objective, involving classroom teachers, in individual building faculty meetings. The committee planned a format for a one-hour session on "The Role of the Teacher in School-Community Relations," which was scheduled for each of the district's 30 school faculties.

This topic was discussed in all of the buildings by members of the faculty following a procedural guide developed by the conference planning committee. A summary of each faculty's suggestions and opinions was compiled by a classroom teacher who was asked to present the ideas and opinions of that faculty at the district public relations conference. Prior to these individual building faculty meetings, the chairman of the conference planning committee had met with all principals to explain the purpose and objective of these discussion sessions and to brief building administrators on the upcoming district public relations conference.

The district conference was held on a Saturday in a local hotel which featured convention and meeting room facilities. It was attended by the 30 classroom teacher representatives, members of the administrative council of the district, members of the public relations committee, and all members of the board of education.

The format of the one-day conference looked like this:

8:45 to 9:15 a.m.	Registration and Coffee
9:15 to 10:00 a.m.	General Session Introductory remarks by the superintendent, who explained the purposes and objectives of the meeting, how it would be conducted. Remarks by the president of the board of education, who emphasized the value of this meeting to the board and school district. Keynote address: By a school public relations consultant.
10:15 to 11:45 a.m.	Discussion Groups (for discussion of defining their problems, fact-finding) A. Classroom Teacher Representatives Conference ("What Is the Role of the Teacher in School-Community Relationships?") B. Administrators Workshop ("How Can We Improve Our Internal Communication?") C. PR Committee Clinic ("How Do We Work with Press and Radio?") D. Board of Education, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent Policy Conference ("Development of a Public Relations Policy")
12:00 noon to 1:15 p.m.	Luncheon
1:30 to 2:45 p.m.	Discussion Groups (repeated; discussion of possible solutions and implementation).
3:00 to 4:00 p.m.	General Session Summary of conclusions reached in each of the four discussion groups and cross-communication, reaction panels.
4:45 p.m.	Conference Summary: By school PR consultant By superintendent
5:00 p.m.	Adjournment

The conclusions reached at the district conference were printed and distributed to each member of the staff of the school district within a few days after the Saturday session. As a result of the conference, the board of education approved a formal public relations policy, a staff newsletter was established and distributed each week throughout the system, a handbook for school news reporters was prepared and distributed to all members of the PR committee, and the district's public relations program took on an entire new look. Newsmen from the local daily newspaper and both radio stations reported the outcome of the conference and a new atmosphere of cooperation and understanding was established between the school district and representatives of the mass media.

This is one example of meeting the needs of planners, participants, and the organization—and of one conference technique. It was organized to meet the varying needs of participants and to attack different types of public relations problems encountered by the district and its employees. In addition, it was just the beginning of a number of in-service training workshops on public relations in this school district.

That's one suggestion. Let's take a look at others.

It Starts in the Classroom

Too many public relations conferences for classroom teachers make it appear that public relations is "just another chore," another extracurricular task for the teacher.

This is misleading. The best school public relations is simply good teaching.

It may not be mentioned in a teaching contract, but the teacher is the first link in the chain of school-community relations. The attitudes, interests, and new skills developed in pupils by teachers are the major elements in determining what parents think about the public schools. Why? Because, as survey after survey points out, a parent's primary source of information about the schools is his child who attends school.

Although they may not realize it, good teachers are shaping public attitudes toward schools in their efforts to inform parents or to bring members of the community into the life and work of the school.

Parent-teacher conferences, visits to the home, newsletters, special notes to parents, and active participation in parent-teacher groups may be part and parcel of teaching school, and they also play a major role in improving the school's public image.

Workshops in school public relations, beamed at classroom teachers, can focus discussion on primary aspects of school public relations:

The Teacher and the Pupil

The Teacher and the Parent

The Teacher and the Community

The Teacher and the Teaching Profession.

Meetings can be planned for the faculty of a single school, for the entire teaching staff of a school system, or for classroom teachers who attend a one-day state, regional, or national conference.

Like all other conferences, however, the program content should be based upon the needs, interests, and problems of the participants who will attend and the organization sponsoring the meeting. Preconference fact-finding among teachers should help them realize that, at last, a public relations workshop has been designed that is geared to their own on-the-job needs and problems.

Here's the schedule for a *half-day public relations workshop* designed by and for the faculty of an elementary school. The objective of this meeting: to improve communication between the school and parents.

Theme: "Bridging the Gap Between Home and School"

1:00 p.m.	General Session (Multipurpose room) Introduction to the Workshop: Principal of school Panel: Four parents who discuss the kinds of information parents want from the school and the role of teachers and parents in improving two-way communication.	
1:45 p.m.	Discussion Groups (Separate rooms) A. Kindergarten teachers B. 1st, 2nd, 3rd grade teachers C. 4th, 5th, 6th grade teachers D. Special education teachers	Each group asked to discuss possible methods of better home-school communication and submit recommendations. One parent from the panel is assigned to each group.

3:15 p.m.	Summary Session (Multipurpose room) Reports and Recommendations from each Discussion Group Workshop Summary: Principal
4:00 p.m.	Adjournment

This brief workshop concentrates on only one specific problem area. Similar conference programs could be held by this faculty on other public relations topics of concern to teachers, such as parent-teacher conferences, newsletters, parent participation in school activities, home visitation, internal communication, and others.

The following plan could be utilized on a local, state, or regional basis for a group of up to 100 classroom teachers meeting in *a one-day workshop*. The objective of this meeting: to emphasize the teacher's importance in school public relations.

Theme: "Public Relations and the Classroom Teacher"

8:45 to 9:15 a.m.	Registration
9:15 to 10:15 a.m.	General Session
	Introductions, Orientation } Conference Chairman
	Keynote Address: "The Public Relations Opportunities of the Classroom Teacher" (Consultant)
	Briefing on Discussion Group Assignments (Chairman)
10:30 to 11:15 a.m.	Discussion Session I
11:15 a.m. to 12:00 Noon	Discussion Session II
12:15 to 1:15 p.m.	Lunch (on your own)
1:30 to 2:15 p.m.	Discussion Session III
2:15 to 3:00 p.m.	Discussion Session IV
3:00 to 3:45 p.m.	General Session
	Summary of the Conference (Conference Chairman)
	Back-Home Implications (Consultant)
	Distribution of "take-home" packet of materials
3:45 p.m.	Adjournment

Discussion Session Topics

Session I:
"Better Public Relations Through Students"

Many teachers say teaching alone assures good public relations, that students are the best PR agents. How true is this? What can teachers do in the classroom to form positive attitudes in the home about school?

Session II:
"Parent-Teacher Conference Techniques"

This session should deal with ways in which teacher skills and techniques can be improved in aspects of communication between parents and teachers—the group parent conference, individual parent conference, telephone conferences, home visitation, etc.

Session III:
"The Staff Works Together for Better Public Relations"

This topic should be a discussion of ways in which staff members in individual schools and as an entire district can work together for better internal and external public relations. What can the staff do to encourage pride in the teaching profession?

Session IV:
"The Teacher and the Community"

How can teachers serve as effective representatives of the school district in contacts with business and community leaders, with citizens who do not have children in the public schools? How much does a teacher need to know about the school district to answer the questions of patrons?

Each discussion session requires a chairman, a recorder, and a resource person. As groups will rotate, a new chairman and recorder are assigned to each discussion session.

The discussion leader is to guide the group, but not attempt to direct the content. Resource people are asked to present a five-minute, capsule summary in a quick preview of the topic of the discussion. Recorders are to fill in forms provided to summarize highlights of the discussion and turn in the summary sheet to the conference chairman at the final general session.

Groups of up to 25 persons each are preassigned by a planning committee. Each group stays intact for all discussion sessions. Each group should be composed of representatives from different groups. Because of the specialized nature of some of the topics, some groups should be composed entirely of elementary, or secondary, teachers.

An assignment sheet for 100 participants might be:

Session	*Group A*	*Group B*	*Group C*	*Group D*
I (10:30-11:15 a.m.)	Students	Parents	Community	Staff
II (11:15 to 12:00 Noon)	Parents	Students	Staff	Community
III (1:30 to 2:15 p.m.)	Staff	Community	Students	Parents
IV (2:15 to 3:00 p.m.)	Community	Staff	Parents	Students

When groupings for the four discussion groups are completed, individual assignments can be made on coupons. Each participant receives four coupons, each a different color to identify the session. A copy of the entire schedule of discussion sessions should be printed in the conference program.

Here is the schedule for another one-day workshop in school public relations for classroom teachers:

Theme: "Public Relations Starts in the Classroom"

8:30 to 9:00 a.m.	Registration and Coffee
9:15 a.m.	General Session Introduction and Orientation Keynote Address: "You're More Than 'Just a Teacher'" (guest speaker) Buzz Groups (to form questions for speaker) Questions and Answers

10:45 a.m.	Panel Discussion: "Tips for Teachers" (three selected teacher participants offer suggestions for better PR through working with students and parents)
	Listening Teams
	Questions and Answers
12:00 Noon	Luncheon
	Film: "School Birds" (NSPRA filmstrip)
1:30 to 3:30 p.m.	Special Interest Clinics (Note: Sessions held from 1:30 to 2:30 and again from 2:30 to 3:30. Participants attend a different clinic each session. Exchange of opinions, experience, ideas; no action required.)
	1. "Parent-Teacher Conferences"
	2. "New Ideas for the PTA"
	3. "Working with Citizen Committees"
	4. "News—and How To Find It"
	5. "PR Tips for Field Trips"
	6. "School Publications"
3:30 p.m.	Adjournment

Displays of appropriate public relations materials of interest to classroom teachers should be provided for workshops such as these. Conference participants should be invited to bring copies of their publications and materials to display and exchange with other conferees.

Materials can also be obtained from the National School Public Relations Association, with discount quantity prices available for publications and other suitable materials.

PR and the Management Team

Here are some ideas for public relations conferences and workshops for school administrators.

A word of caution, though. Your objectives for such a conference will help you determine whether participants should include all levels of school administration and supervision, or a selected group from administration. It may be difficult for an elementary school principal, for example, to feel free to express his opinions in a discussion group composed mainly of school superintendents (especially *his* superintendent). Some public relations conferences for administrators are restricted to superintendents and assistant superintendents, while a separate meeting is conducted for principals and supervisors. The nature of the group of participants and content of the conference will determine whether discussion groups should contain all levels of administration, or whether separate sessions should be held.

Consider giving the participants some work to do in advance of the conference. This can be some specific reading material, submitting a questionnaire, listing the public relations problems of the individual's school district, or preparing a case study in school public relations.

Restrict the scope of the conference. Will you try to focus attention on a few specific public relations problems—such as internal communication, press relations, citizen committees—or present an overview to the district's public relations program?

Here are examples of formats used in public relations conferences conducted for school administrators:

Participants:	Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents
Time:	One-half day
Objective:	Defining the role of the school public relations specialist
Theme:	"PR in School Administration"
1:30 to 3:00 p.m.	Opening Session Orientation to Workshop Speaker: "School Public Relations: What It Is and What It Isn't" (a school superintendent, public relations specialist, or NSPRA staff member) Speaker: "How To Establish a School Public Relations Program" (a school PR specialist or superintendent) Question Period (use of quick buzz groups)
3:00 to 4:30 p.m.	Discussion Work Groups Each group composed of 10 to 20 participants with a chairman, recorder, and resource person. Task is to come up with stated PR objectives and responsibilities of a school district.
4:45 to 5:30 p.m.	Summary Session Each recorder reports on the work of his group and then the consultant summarizes findings of all groups.
5:30 to 6:15 p.m.	Social Hour
6:30 p.m.	Dinner Speaker: "The Role and Responsibility of Schools in Communicating with the Community"

Participants:	Entire administrative staff of a school district
Time:	One day
Objective:	Inform administrative staff of the district's public relations program
8:45 to 9:15 a.m.	Coffee
9:15 a.m.	General Session Superintendent of Schools: Explanation of District PR Policy and Objectives Director, School-Community Relations: An Overview of the District's Public Relations Program
10:15 to 10:30 a.m.	Coffee Break
10:30 a.m. to 12 Noon	Discussion Work Groups: Internal Communication (10 to 20 in a group, combining supervisors, principals, and central office administrators; chairman, recorder)

12:15 to 1:30 p.m.	Luncheon Speaker: "Schools Are News" (local education reporter or newspaper editor)
1:45 to 3:00 p.m.	Discussion, Special Interest Groups (Objective: PR Opportunities for School Administrators) Group A: Building Principals Group B: Supervisors Group C: Central Office Administrators (Each group has a chairman and recorder)
3:00 p.m.	General Session Summary of Recommendations on Internal Communication for the School District Summary of Recommendations on PR Opportunities of Principals, Supervisors, and Central Office Administrators Closing Remarks: Superintendent
4:00 p.m.	Adjournment

Participants:	Entire administrative staff of a school district
Time:	Two-day, preschool workshop
Objective:	Development of a School District Public Relations Program
	(*First Day*)
8:30 a.m.	Coffee
9:00 a.m.	Workshop Opening Session Introduction of new administrative staff members Orientation to the workshop: Superintendent or chairman of the workshop Greetings: President, Board of Education
9:30 a.m.	Address: Keynoter to set the tone for the workshop Role and responsibility of the school district and staff in school-community relations Question-and-answer period
10:30 a.m.	Break
10:45 a.m.	Work Group Discussions to define areas of concentration in development of a district public relations program Groups of 10 to 20 participants, composed heterogeneously from the conference group. Each with a discussion leader and recorder.

12:00 Noon	Luncheon
1:30 p.m.	General Session: School public relations consultant or industrial public relations director on "The Strategy of Communication"
2:45 p.m.	Break
3:00 p.m.	Discussion Groups meet again to formulate their recommendations for major areas of development in the organization of a district PR program
4:30 p.m.	Meeting of chairmen and recorders of all Discussion Groups. Chairman of the workshop and keynoter work with this group to summarize recommendations of all participants.
6:00 p.m.	Dinner
7:30 p.m.	General Session Chairman reports recommendations of Work Group Discussions Superintendent: Remarks and Suggestions
9:30 p.m.	Social Hour and snacks
	(Second Day)
8:00 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 a.m.	General Session Public relations consultant or industrial public relations director who spoke at the afternoon session of the pervious day suggests basic ingredients in district's PR program. Formulated from his advice and based upon participants' recommendations of previous day. Prepared with chairman of the workshop and superintendent after the first day and evening session.
10:15 a.m.	Break
10:30 a.m.	Special Interest Group Discussions To suggest plans and activities in specific areas of PR program, i.e.: Communication (with the staff) Publications Distributed to the Community Community Press Relations Speakers Bureau American Education Week Citizen Advisory Committees
12:00 Noon	Luncheon
1:15 p.m.	Group Meetings Elementary School Principals

	Secondary School Principals Directors and Consultants
2:45 p.m	Break
3:00 p.m.	General Session Reports from Special Interest Groups Summary and Observations: Keynoter reviews accomplishments of the workshop
3:45 p.m.	Adjournment

Nuts and Bolts Conferences For the PR Specialist

As the audience changes, so should the program.

Public relations workshops or conferences held for classroom teachers differ from those conducted for school administrators. And the content of a conference for the school PR specialist will also differ, in most cases, from each of the other two, due to the specific problems and experience of the on-the-job public relations director.

For one thing, this type of participant may be expected to do more "homework" before the conference than is asked of the classroom teacher or administrator.

The groupings within the general framework of the conference may include more special interest groups, more skill practice sessions—and the entire conference might be designed as a clinic session, rather than a workshop.

One common error found in many conferences for school public relations practitioners is the assumption that all the participants are experienced, knowledgeable, and in positions of authority and responsibility. Wide variations in assignments and functions are found among school public relations specialists. These differences must be recognized and accounted for in preparing the program of a public relations conference for the PR specialist.

Here are examples of three different public relations meetings designed for the school PR specialist:

Participants:	School PR specialists from small, suburban, and city schools in a regional or single geographical area
Time:	Half-day and evening
Objective:	Obtain information
1:30 p.m.	General Session Introductions and Remarks (Clinic chairman) Speaker: Public relations consultant (education, business, or industry) who discusses the role and function of the PR specialist Question-and-answer period, utilizing reaction panel or interview panel
2:30 p.m.	Coffee break
2:45 to 5:00 p.m.	Clinic Sessions (Three different groups which rotate through sessions of 45

minutes each. Newspaper staff members serve as the trainers)

Group 1: Newswriting
Group 2: Feature writing
Group 3: Photography

5:00 p.m. — Social hour

6:00 p.m. — Dinner

Speaker:

Well-known newsman, editor, commentator

8:00 p.m. — Adjournment

Participants: — School PR specialists from different sizes and types of school districts (small, suburban, rural, cities)

Time: — One-day conference

Objective: — Obtain information

8:30 to 9:15 a.m. — Registration and Coffee

9:15 a.m. — General Session

Introductions
Orientation to the Conference
Speaker:

"Why a School Public Relations Program?" (Superintendent, PR consultant, NSPRA officer or staff member)

Speaker:

"The Strategy of Communication" (professor in communications from state university)

10:45 a.m. to 12:00 Noon — "Consultant Kaffeeklatches" (Participants are asked to take their coffee to table where resource person will assist in discussion)

1. Financial Campaigns, small communities
2. Financial Campaigns, suburban districts
3. Financial Campaigns, cities

12:15 to 1:30 p.m. — Luncheon

Speaker:

Report on current status of educational legislation, finance (member of state legislature, state superintendent, professional association executive)

1:45 to 3:00 p.m. — Panel: "How To Use Us in Telling the School Story"

Panel members consist of an editor of a weekly newspaper; education writer for a daily paper; radio news director; television news director

3:00 p.m. — Adjournment

(Seminar format through the courtesy of School Management Institue, Inc., and the National School Public Relations Association)

Participants: School administrators interested in establishing a school public relations program, part-time and full-time school public relations specialists

Time: Two-day seminar

Objective: How to organize and develop a school PR program

NOTE: Registration at 5 p.m. and dinner at 6:30 p.m. precede the first session.

SESSION I Sunday, 7:30 p.m.

Keynote Address (45 min.): Seminar director discusses such topics as the function of school public relations including:

A. Public relations as a key area of school administration
B. The role of the superintendent in PR
C. The role of the board of education in PR
D. Patterns of organization (where does the PR man fit into the picture?)
E. The PR man's staff relationships (with the superintendent, other central office staff members, etc.)
F. Inconsistent perceptions of the role of the PR man

Panel Discussion (30 min.): "Role of the School PR Man"

Three resource people (school public relations man and two superintendents from different types of school districts) each make an eight-minute presentation, outlining their views of the role of the school PR man.

Moderator involves panelists in a 15-minute discussion of points brought up, and overlooked, in the two presentations.

Participants: Given sheets of paper to describe the PR problems they face. These are to be used by the conference staff to sharpen the focus of remaining sessions.

SESSION II Monday, 9 a.m.

Speaker (45 min.) Public relations consultant, experienced school PR man, officer or staff member of NSPRA, discusses:

"The Strategic Aspects of School Public Relations"

Factors that should be taken into consideration in making PR decisions. Stated as questions, such factors are:

A. What information needs to be communicated?
B. Who should communicate the information?
C. Who is to receive the information?
D. Which medium of communication should be employed to convey the message?
E. When should the communication be broadcast or distributed?

Question-and-answer period (15 min.)

SESSION III Monday, 10:15 a.m.

Speaker (35 min.): Public relations specialist discusses:

"Internal Communications"

A. Importance of providing two-way communications.

B. Productive techniques in internal communications (both time-tested and novel). Includes conferences, meetings, publications, faculty councils, etc.

C. Communications aspects of personnel administration. Orientation is toward the interpretation of policy.

Speaker (35 min.): Superintendent discusses:

"Inservice Education in PR for the Staff"

A. Objectives toward which a program should be pointed.

B. Productive techniques employed in a school district's inservice education in PR, including the mechanics of the program.

C. Staff reactions to the program and the superintendent's evaluation of the program.

D. Unfinished business in inservice education in PR.

Question-and-answer period (15 min.): Both speakers answer questions from participants.

SESSION IV Monday, 1:30 p.m.

Speaker (45 min.): Consultant in printing, layout, and design discusses design of PR materials, illustration, layout, etc.

Question-and-answer period (45 min.) from the floor.

SESSION V Monday, 3:15 p.m.

Idea Exchange (75 min.): Participants are assigned to one of four specific groups to share bright ideas. Four members of the seminar staff serve as the resource people for the groups.

SESSION VI Monday, 7:30 p.m.

Speaker (30 min.): Communications expert from the field of journalism discusses: "Media Relations"

A. Unique strength of each communications medium.

B. How school PR personnel can be of greatest help to media representatives.

C. Techniques that can be used in handling common problems experienced by school PR personnel in dealing with media representatives.

Speaker (30 min): Representative from a radio or TV station discusses "Relations with the Program Director"

A. Subject matter particularly suited to the broadcasting media.

B. Trends in public service programing.

Clinics (60 min.): Participants are allowed free access to specialists in:

A. Press relations
B. Publications
C. Radio-TV relations
D. Internal communications

SESSION VII Tuesday, 9 a.m.

Speaker (45 min.): A member of the conference staff, an experienced public relations consultant, discusses:

"How To Make the Most of Your PR Resources"

Question-and-answer period (15 min.)

SESSION VIII Tuesday, 10:15 a.m.

Speaker (30 min.): Seminar director discusses citizen involvement in the schools through advisory committees and home visitations by school personnel.

Speaker (30 min.): Conference resource person discusses citizen involvement through special events, such as open-house programs, BIE days, science fairs, American Education Week, Teaching Career Month, student exhibits.

Question-and-answer period (10 min.): Both speakers answer questions from the participants.

Participants (10 min.) are asked to jot down a PR problem of concern to them. This goes on an index card. On another index card of a different size, they are asked to state the most significant thing they learned at the Seminar. This information will shape the content of the final session.

SESSION IX Tuesday, 1:30 p.m.

Announcements (5 min.) by Seminar staff.

Clinic (40 min.) on participant problems, as reported on cards from previous session. Three members of the staff or resource personnel respond to the questions.

Summary of Seminar (15 min.) by the Director.

Adjournment at 2:30 p.m.

For Board Members Only

Public relations conferences for school board members may not involve training but often consist of a meeting aimed at policy-making, problem-solving, information-giving, or discussion.

A brief, half-day workshop can be the basis for formulating a school district policy toward public relations.

It is difficult to get board members together for a workshop or conference. The increasing complexity of public education has doubled and often tripled the meeting hours required of school board members. But a major policy decision, such as formulation of the district's public relations policy, requires considerable thought and discussion. A compact workshop can be an excellent method of arriving at this policy decision.

Here is a suggested format for a half-day conference, planned for a district school board, to fashion a public relations policy:

Participants:	Members of a board of education, superintendent of schools, other key administrators
Time:	One-half day
Objective:	Developing a Public Relations Policy
12:30 p.m.	Luncheon Presiding: President of the board Speaker (Public relations consultant from education, business, or industry): "Public Relations: Theory and Practice"
2:00 to 4:30 p.m.	"Conpar" Workshop Method Chairman: Superintendent of schools Speaker (Member of a board of education which has adopted a PR policy or officer in state school boards association): "Developing a Policy for Public Relations" (Luncheon speaker serves with this speaker as two-man panel to answer questions from the group, following formal presentation.) Discussion focus on formulation of a written public relations policy for the district.
4:30 p.m.	Adjournment

The next format illustrates a Workshop on public relations held for school board members attending a regional conference.

Participants:	Members of boards of education from various school districts
Time:	One day
Objective:	To emphasize the importance of a planned school public relations program, and to clarify the role of the board in that program.

8:45 to 9:15 a.m.	Registration and Coffee
9:15 to 10:15 a.m.	General Session Introductions Orientation
Workshop Chairman	Keynote Address (45 min.) by a public relations consultant or NSPRA officer or staff member. "The School Public Relations Program: A Link to Cooperation and Support" Briefing on Discussion Group assignments (by the Workshop chairman)
10:30 to 11:15 a.m.	Discussion Session I
11:15 a.m. to 12:00 Noon	Discussion Session II
12:15 to 1:15 p.m.	Lunch (on your own)
1:30 to 2:15 p.m.	Discussion Session III
2:15 to 3:00 p.m.	Discussion Session IV
3:00 to 3:45 p.m.	General Session Summary of the Workshop (Chairman) Back-Home Implications (Keynote speaker) Distribution of "take-home packet"
3:45 p.m.	Adjournment

Discussion Session Topics:

"Developing a Policy for Public Relations"
"Working with Press, Radio, and TV"
"Internal and External Communication"
"Working with Citizen Committees"

Each discussion session requires a chairman, a recorder, and an experienced resource person in the area under discussion. Groups will rotate, so a new chairman and recorder are assigned to each discussion session. The leaders are to guide the discussion, not direct the content. Resource people will present a five-minute, capsule summary of the topic and assist when necessary. Recorders are to summarize highlights, both agreements and disagreements, on the forms provided for each discussion. These are turned in to the workshop chairman for his summary at the final general session. Groups of up to 25 persons each are preassigned by the planning committee. Each group stays intact for all discussion sessions, but participants should represent school districts of different types and enrollments.

An assignment sheet for 100 discussion

participants in such a one-day workshop might be:

Session	*Group A*	*Group B*	*Group C*	*Group D*
I (10:30 to 11:15 a.m.)	Policy	Press	Communi-cation	Citizens
II (11:15 a.m. to 12:00 Noon)	Press	Policy	Citizens	Communi-cation
III (1:30 to 2:15 p.m.)	Communi-cation	Citizens	Press	Policy
IV (2:15 to 3:00 p.m.)	Citizens	Communi-cation	Policy	Press

50

9. Evaluation

The final step in the conference process is to seek answers to two questions: "How did we do? Would we have done better if we had tried something else?"

Measure the Results

One of the major weaknesses of many workshops and conferences has been the lack of yardsticks to measure results. Evaluation takes time and requires some skill. But it is worthwhile.

Evaluation of your conference is the first step in planning the next meeting. And if this evaluation is an honest attempt to get at the truth, the next conference will almost certainly be better than the last one.

Public relations specialists talk about pre-testing and post-testing. Earlier in this book, pre-testing the needs, interests, and problems of the conference participants was suggested in the task of planning the conference program. Post-testing is necessary to measure the results of that planning.

A word of caution, however. Evaluation is not limited to the traditional post-conference huddle when members of the planning committee pack up the remnants of the meeting, agree "it was a huge success," and head for home. Evaluation requires the opinions of the participants as well as of the planners. It should include opinions of *all* the participants, opinions voiced at various times *during* the meeting, not just at the end of the conference, or after they have returned home.

Let's examine the evaluation process, which should produce an objective, pertinent report, designed to measure how effectively the objectives of the meeting were met.

Organize the Fact-Finding Process

Someone other than the conference chairman should be assigned the responsibility for formal evaluation. The chairman or conference director is probably "too close to the forest to see the trees" and his evaluation may, quite naturally, reflect bias and the high hopes of the planning committee. Then, too, participants sometimes have a tendency to tell the chairman what they think he would like to hear, not how they really felt about the conference.

For a small conference, one person could handle the evaluation job. A larger conference may require a committee to prepare and follow through the necessary steps of evaluation.

This responsibility includes:

1. Designing the fact-finding and evaluation devices.
2. Training interviewers and observers, if required.
3. Serving as liaison with work group observers, if these are used in small discussion sessions.
4. Tabulating and interpreting the evaluation data.
5. Recommending to the conference planning committee, the policy group, and future planning committees improvements in the conference organization and pattern.

Evaluation, like anything else, can be overdone. Excessive evaluation can be as harmful as the reverse situation, when no attempt is made at evaluation.

What Do You Want To Know?

Planners need to know the answers to some basic questions in order to measure the effectiveness of the conference and guide their efforts in future planning. Participants should be asked:

- What did you hope to get out of the conference?
- Were your expectations fulfilled? Completely? Partially?
- How useful was the meeting?
- How well were *your* problems dealt with?
- What could be done to improve this meeting?
- What is your opinion on the methods of presentation used?
- What suggestions do you have for the subject matter of a future, similar conference?
- What use, if any, do you plan to make of the material from this conference?

These, and similar questions, can be asked *during* the conference. Don't wait until the closing session, when there are other things to do and participants are mentally packed to leave.

Sample interviews can be obtained daily. Some conference planners assign interview teams the responsibility of asking questions of a handful of participants at lunch each day. These questions can be aimed at the evaluation of the mechanics of the meeting (adequacy of communications, physical arrangements, satisfaction with a speaker, a work group session, etc.) or a measure of the effectiveness of the content of the entire program to date. Feedback of this information is helpful to the conference chairman and his steering committee, as well as future planning committees.

Off-the-record groups of five to ten participants can be included in the conference timetable. No formal reporting is required, but these groups can become an informal channel to the conference staff for gripes and suggestions. Some discussion leaders plan this at the conclusion of their small work group meetings.

Oral evaluations can be easily obtained in a small workshop or clinic. The evaluator simply takes each member of the group aside and asks him a list of questions. A tape recorder might be used to record the comments of evaluation at the end of a small group discussion, if the members of the group are willing. The danger here is that the presence of a tape recorder prevents anonymous replies, in the eyes of many participants. You can't easily tabulate this kind of information, but it does provide a barometer of opinion which is helpful to the conference planning committee.

Written questionnaires are usually used for evaluation in larger conference groups. These should be printed in advance and distributed to participants with their kit of conference materials or handed out at the appropriate time during the conference.

Multiple choice answers are often provided. For example:

"How do you rate what you heard from the speaker at the first general session?"

____ Extremely valuable
____ Moderately valuable
____ Of little value
____ Of no value
____ Did not attend

"Considering the program of the day as a whole, what part was helpful to you? Check as many of the following as you choose."

____ Opening general session
____ Small group discussions (Which group? _____)
____ Closing general session
____ Exhibits and materials

Open-end or essay questions should be included in the written questionnaire to allow for free expression of opinion, such as:

"What, if anything, do you think could be done to better the conference?"

"What part of the program was the *least* significant? Why?"

"What suggestions do you have which you believe might be useful in the planning of future seminars?"

Keep your written questionnaire short and simple. If it is too long and too complicated, participants may not return it, or may respond to only part of the questions. A one-page, 8½ x 11 inch sheet of paper is enough for most questionnaires. If your feedback instrument is longer, the number of replies and the depth and detail of the answers will diminish.

Do not ask participants to sign the questionnaire. Simply indicate that signatures are not necessary.

Although you want participants to turn in their evaluations before they leave the conference, it is not a bad idea to include a stamped, return envelope with the participant's conference kit so he can easily submit his questionnaire after he returns home.

A combination of personal interviews, conducted on a random sampling basis, written questionnaires, off-the-record group discussions, and the impressions and observations of the planning committee should provide an effective indication of the success of this conference—and the next one.

10. Reporting the Results

A participant has to travel both geographically and socially when he attends a conference or workshop. And this applies, to some extent, whether he journeys to another part of the country for a national conference, or only as far as the school district's administrative office building for an inservice training workshop.

The Conference "Island"

Every conference is a miniature society which is set up to assimilate, for a while, "immigrants" from various back-home, on-the-job, cultures.

The aim of the conference is to produce changes in these immigrants through conference associations, changes which will modify, directly or indirectly, back-home practices and patterns. Hopefully, a conference is designed to make the participant different from the way he was when he came.

Kenneth D. Benne, of Boston University, and the late Charlotte K. Demorest have described three typical ways conference participants can handle dual membership of conference and home community. They suggest the participant can react as:

A tourist. Resisting involvement in the conference, he rejects the conference as being "impractical" and theoretical; feels the methods and techniques heard at the conference are unlike the way things operate at home.

An expatriate. Far from rejecting the conference experience, the expatriate accepts it enthusiastically and uncritically. What he rejects, at least for the time, are his back-home situation and membership.

A learner. He accepts membership in the conference community and opens himself to influence from others who are there. But he tests conference ideas against back-home problems and situations, relates relevant on-the-job experiences to problems discussed at the conference.

How the participant reacts to the conference will have a lot to do with what he does, if anything, with his conference experiences when he goes home. He is faced with two problems when he leaves the conference: immediate reporting to superiors, colleagues, or subordinates; and long-range changes in attitudes, policies, or procedures.

Reporting the Results

Conference participants may appreciate some help, before the meeting ends, on reporting their experiences at the conference.

At some conferences, *a general session* is devoted specifically to the problem of applying principles and recommendations. Individuals or teams may report on post-conference plans. Experts or participants or both may then make a clinical critique of these plans. Participants also may be asked to act out their projected first step upon arriving back on the job, whether this step is reporting to the boss, discussing the conference at a staff meeting, or trying out some new technique on the job. Other participants can then discuss what has been acted out and can clarify and face the problems they will en-

counter when they return to their home communities.

Other methods of assisting participants in reporting are:

- Throughout the conference, *encourage participants to discuss* how they will report their findings to colleagues at home.
- Give participants a *directory of available resource people,* so that each participant will be able to schedule a consultation period within the conference limits of time and availability. Here each individual can discuss, with the resource person, possible ways of utilizing conference ideas back home, and can organize the reporting of those ideas.
- Provide each participant with a suggested *checklist* to help in the organization of the written report to his superiors.
- Provide a *"take-home packet" of materials* which summarize the major activities and ideas formulated at the conference, including any samples of materials distributed at the meeting.
- *Encourage participants to take notes.* Provide notebooks in which each participant can keep a condensed outline of the subjects discussed at the conference.
- *Leave some time* in the conference schedule so that teams of participants can meet from time to time. Give them a chance to compare notes and to relate their conference experiences to back-home problems.

Like all educational arrangements, Benne and Demorest point out, a conference builds a temporary association designed to produce changes in the people who become members of it.

But a conference or workshop encounters a danger which is common to all educational arrangements—the danger of isolation. A conference is usually removed from the realities of the participants' home setting. Yet, ideally, it is designed to alter and improve that setting.

The task for conference planners is to design a conference which will help participants relate what they have learned with their own on-the-job problems and thus bridge the gap between the ideal and the real.

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B. A Questionnaire for Conference Planners

Planning conferences and workshops is a complex process which requires skill, time, and plenty of hard work. Good conferences don't just happen. They are planned.

And a good conference requires thoughtful answers to questions like these:

_____ Why is this conference being held?
_____ What is its purpose? Long-range objectives? Short-term objectives?
_____ What are the needs of the participants? The planners? The organization?
_____ Who will plan the conference? How?
_____ What is your budget?
_____ Where will the meeting be held? When?
_____ What are the criteria for determining the kind of meeting to be held? The groupings used? Methods of presentation? Amount and type of audience participation?
_____ Who are the speakers? What resource people are needed? Discussion leaders? Recorders?
_____ What kinds of facilities are required? Equipment? Materials? Exhibits? Staff?
_____ What type of briefing is necessary for program participants? Staff?
_____ How will you promote attendance and publicize the conference?
_____ How will you communicate during the conference?
_____ How will you communicate or report following the conference?
_____ How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting?

This Conference Planner was prepared to help you find the answers to these and other questions when you plan your next conference or workshop.

C. Conference Planner's Checklist

A conference is made up of dozens of small details and major planning items. This checklist was prepared to keep conference planners from overlooking some item that might spoil an otherwise perfect meeting.

Attendance

- ☐ Total number of participants expected _____
- ☐ Methods of transportation to conference site

Housing Accommodations

- ☐ Approximate number of rooms required, classified by type: Singles _____
  Doubles _____
  Twins _____
  Suites _____
- ☐ Understanding on room rates by type and the period over which they apply
- ☐ Understanding as to the number of complimentary suites and rooms to be provided
- ☐ Pattern of arrivals: majority of group arriving _____; others _____
- ☐ Pattern of departures: majority of group departing _____; others _____
- ☐ Understanding whether reservations are to be made directly by participants or cleared through housing center
- ☐ Understanding regarding number of rooms to be held for officers, staff, guests, program participants, etc.
- ☐ Understanding regarding whether rooms are to be charged to individuals or billed to master account
- ☐ Date uncommitted guest rooms are to be released _____

Meeting Rooms

- ☐ Schedule of correct dates and times and rooms assigned for each session given to building management
- ☐ Seating capacity and type of room setup required
- ☐ Public address system required
- ☐ Platform required
- ☐ Special equipment required
- ☐ Determine basic cost of all facilities, equipment, and services
- ☐ Who is contact for last-minute changes or when setup needs adjusting?

Immediately prior to meeting, check:

- ☐ Meeting room setup:
- ☐ Are meetings listed correctly on hotel bulletin boards?
- ☐ Are enough seats on platform?
- ☐ Cooling/heating system working?
- ☐ Public address system working?
- ☐ Special requirements in place?
- ☐ Special equipment operating properly?
- ☐ Operator on hand?
- ☐ Lectern light operating?
- ☐ Decorations in place?

- ☐ Water pitcher and glass in place? With water in pitcher?
- ☐ Lighting?

Immediately following meeting, who will:

- ☐ Remove organizational property?
- ☐ Check for forgotten materials?

Other important points:

- ☐ If meeting room is difficult to find, use directional signs
- ☐ If meeting room has been changed, post notice conspicuously

Registration

Prior to conference, have arrangements been made for:

- ☐ Registration clerks, dates, and hours?
- ☐ Typewriters and necessary furniture?
- ☐ Cashboxes?
- ☐ Have adequate signs been prepared? Registration Desk, Tickets, Information, Hospitality, Special Events, Advance Registration, Exhibits, No Smoking Conference Office, Other
- ☐ Is masking tape available for mounting?

Immediately prior to opening, check:

- ☐ Proper lighting and identification for registration desk
- ☐ Wastebaskets available
- ☐ Are programs and other materials in place?
- ☐ Are receipt forms available?

Has registration staff been fully informed regarding:

- ☐ Registration procedure?
- ☐ Policy on accepting checks?
- ☐ Policy on refunds?
- ☐ Information desired on registration cards?
- ☐ Information desired on badge?
- ☐ Ticket prices and policies?
- ☐ What to do about program participants and guests?

If participant is to fill out his own registration card:

- ☐ Are extra tables set up away from registration desk?
- ☐ Registration cards and pencils in place?
- ☐ Simple instructions conveniently posted?
- ☐ Are time-consuming operations separate from registration desk?

During registration, will someone be available for:

- ☐ Single ticket sales?
- ☐ Emergency housing?
- ☐ Hospitality desk?
- ☐ Making policy decisions?
- ☐ Accommodating members wishing to register after desk has closed?
- ☐ Relieving registration clerks for meals?
- ☐ Checking out funds at closing time?

Meal Functions

Prior to conference, check with hotel or conference center:

- ☐ Number of places to be set _____
- ☐ Number at head table _____
- ☐ Menu
- ☐ Cost, price including tax and tip _____
- ☐ When must final guarantee be made?
- ☐ Who will submit final guarantee?
- ☐ What will be exact serving time?
- ☐ Will tickets be taken at door or table?
- ☐ Procedure for guest without ticket
- ☐ Who will make payment for function and when
- ☐ Tables set up early enough to decorate
- ☐ Public address system available
- ☐ Lectern available
- ☐ Who will provide tickets?
- ☐ Who is hotel contact for last-minute problems?

Immediately prior to function, check:

- ☐ Proper number of seats
- ☐ Place cards in place
- ☐ Decorations, favors, menus in place
- ☐ Public address system working
- ☐ Lectern in place and operating

Speakers, Panelists, Other Program Participants

Prior to the conference:

- ☐ Have speakers been invited early?
- ☐ Informed on length of time available to them?
- ☐ Informed on nature of the conference, type of talk desired?
- ☐ Date and time arriving
- ☐ Is speaker to be accompanied by wife or husband?
- ☐ Has hotel reservation been made and confirmed?
- ☐ Will speaker require special equipment?
- ☐ Has he been furnished with program or tentative program as early as possible?
- ☐ Has someone been designated to meet speaker upon arrival in city?
- ☐ Are biographical material and photo available for publicity and introduction?

Financial arrangements understood:

- ☐ Expenses only
- ☐ Fee only
- ☐ Fee plus expenses
- ☐ When is payment to be made?

Immediately prior to meeting, check:

- ☐ Has speaker been introduced to other platform or head table guests?
- ☐ Has he been briefed on progress of conference, number of participants?
- ☐ Has he tried out the public address system, seen the meeting room?

Have special needs been met:

- ☐ Chalkboard or easel?
- ☐ Pointer, chalk, eraser in place?
- ☐ Need help in turning charts?
- ☐ Projector and screen on hand?
- ☐ Projector stand available?
- ☐ Projectionist on hand? Instructions given? Material provided?
- ☐ Who will turn lights on, off?
- ☐ Is material to be passed out?
- ☐ Is emergency speaker available in case of a "no show"?

Exhibits

- ☐ Number of exhibits and floor plans
- ☐ Hours of exhibits
- ☐ Setup date
- ☐ Dismantle date
- ☐ Directional signs
- ☐ Any labor charges?
- ☐ Electrician and carpenter services
- ☐ Any special charges?
- ☐ Partitions, backdrops needed
- ☐ Security precautions
- ☐ Storage of shipping cartons

Miscellaneous

- ☐ Have arrangements been made to duplicate registration lists?
- ☐ Hospitality arranged for men, women, children?
- ☐ Fire regulations and hotel policy checked regarding decorations, storage?

Guests:

- ☐ Invitations to local dignitaries
- ☐ Acceptances of invitations
- ☐ Tickets provided
- ☐ Transportation arranged
- ☐ Welcome at hotel by _____

D. Checklist: For Preparing a Conference Report

Many school districts require that conference participants submit a report of the meeting to school administrators and colleagues. This report is frequently circulated to other staff members or to members of the board of education. Reviewing the following checklist may help you in preparing your report.

What Was the Value of the Conference?

A. To you as a classroom teacher
   1. What new ideas were triggered by the conference?
   2. What new areas of investigation opened?
   3. Did you find others with similar problems?
   4. How was your thinking as a teacher broadened by the conference?
   5. Was it practical and down to earth?

B. To your school district
   1. What new approaches to existing problems did you get?
   2. Did other school districts have answers to problems similar to ours?
   3. What teachers in other school districts with similar problems did you meet?
   4. What valuable exchange of experience with others from other school districts was there?
   5. What did you pick up by way of classroom tips which were helpful?

What About the Group Attending the Conference?

A. What was the general nature of the group?
B. What school districts were represented?
C. What was the size of the conference group?
D. What levels of education were represented?
E. How did the group respond to the subject matter?

How About the Leadership?

A. Who were the leaders?
B. Were their experience and background suitable?
C. How effective were they in leading the meeting?

What About the Facilities?

A. Did the facilities help to achieve the purpose of the meeting?
B. What were they like?
C. How were the physical details of meeting arranged?

E. Samples of Conference Evaluation Forms

E-1. Evaluation of Public Relations Conference

Name of Organization

Date

1. Considering the program of the day as a whole, what part was helpful to you? (Check as many of the following as you choose.)
   - _____ a. Opening General Session
   - _____ b. Small Group Discussions
     Which group?_____
   - _____ c. Reaction Panels
     Which panel?_____
   - _____ d. Exhibits and Materials
   - _____ e. Closing General Session

2. How do you rate what you have heard from the speakers? (Check as many of the following as you choose.)
   - _____ a. Too much repetition
   - _____ b. Of little value
   - _____ c. Satisfactory
   - _____ d. Much new information
   - _____ e. Of great value

3. What new ideas did you hear?_____

4. Can you use these new ideas at home? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

5. What, if anything, do you think could be done to better the program?
   _____
   _____

E-2. Participant Report

Name of Organization

Name of Public Relations Conference

Date

Your candid reactions to the Conference will help us plan future meetings. Your comments need not be signed, but PLEASE return the completed questionnaire to _____.

1. Please state your primary objective in registering for this Conference:
   _____

2. Was this objective largely achieved through your participation in the Conference? ☐ Well Achieved ☐ Mostly Achieved ☐ Moderately Achieved ☐ Not Achieved

3. The topics which were MOST INTERESTING or most valuable for my purposes were: _____
   _____

4. The topics which were LEAST INTERESTING or least valuable for my purposes were: _____
   _____

5. What I liked most about the organization and procedure of the Conference was: _____

6. A suggested change or improvement in organization or procedure would be:
   _____

7. Do you have any suggestions for the improvement of the group's discussion process? _____

8. What new topics might well be added when the next similar Conference is given? _____

9. What changes would you recommend in the physical facilities, meals, schedules, length of Conference, etc.?
   _____

10. In general, how do you rate this Conference?
    ☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

(Use back of page for other comments)

E-3. Participant Reaction Sheet for Public Relations Workshop

Name of Organization

Date

The planning committee would appreciate your comments concerning this Workshop. Please express your opinions by completing the statements below and returning your reply to _____. No signature is necessary. Your comments will help plan future Workshops on this subject.

A. I attended the section on: _____.

B. (Please circle the answer that best expresses your opinion):
   1. This Workshop (will, will not) help me to do my job better.
   2. I (have, have not) learned some new techniques at this Workshop.
   3. I (knew, did not know) most of the techniques explained at the Workshop.
   4. I (think, do not think) this Workshop dealt with real problems.
   5. This Workshop (held, did not hold) my interest very well.
   6. I (would, would not) profit by attendance at another Workshop.

C. (Please check the statement that best expresses your opinion):
   1. This workshop was just what I desired and needed. _____
   2. The methods of explanation were above my head. _____
   3. The methods of explanation were below my expectations. _____

D. The one thing I liked most about the Workshop was: _____
_____

E. The one thing I liked least about this Workshop was: _____
_____

F. Other comments:

G. Possible topics for next year:

E-4. Seminar Evaluation Questionnaire

Title of Conference

Date

We would appreciate your cooperation in filling out the following evaluation questionnaire. Your reaction and responses to this year's Seminar will be very valuable in the planning for future seminars. No signature is necessary. Return your reply to _____.

1. Please rate information presented by General Session speakers according to usefulness to you. Mark A (extremely valuable); B (moderately valuable); C (of little value); D (of no value); and E (did not attend).
   ☐ (name of speaker) ☐ (name of speaker)
   ☐ (name of speaker) ☐ (name of speaker)

2. Who was chairman of the Workshop Session you attended? _____
   Please rate this Session according to the following scale: A (extremely valuable); B (moderately valuable); C (of little value); D (of no value); E (did not attend): ☐

3. What Workshop Session topics would you like to have included in future Seminars? _____

4. What one speaker, general session, or special section of the entire Seminar program do you rate above all others as being the most valuable feature? _____

5. Please rate the exhibit of publications according to the following scale: A (extremely valuable); B (moderately valuable); C (of little value); D (of no value): ☐

6. Indicate type of publications you would like to see exhibited at future Seminars: _____

(Please add other suggestions and comments on reverse side)

E-5. Conference Questionnaire

Title of Conference

Date

In our efforts to make future Conferences as meaningful as possible, we are asking you to give us your reaction to this year's meeting. Your suggestions will be most helpful in planning the next Conference. No signature is necessary. Please complete this questionnaire, place it in the envelope, and turn it in to _____ when you leave the final General Session.

1. What did you expect to gain from attendance at this Conference?
   _____
   _____

2. Were your expectations fulfilled?
   Very much so _____
   Moderately so _____
   No _____

3. What aspect of this Conference was <u>most</u> significant to you? _____
   _____
   _____

4. What aspect of this Conference was <u>least</u> significant to you? _____
   _____

5. What aspect of this Conference will be most useful in your school district's public relations program? _____
   _____

6. Please evaluate the Discussion Session in which you participated:
   I participated in Discussion Session #_____
   I think the discussion leader was ☐ good ☐ fair ☐ poor.
   Our topic for discussion (was) (was not) interesting to me.

7. If you were responsible for planning this program, would you make any changes in it and, if so, what changes would you make?

E-6. Workshop Rating Form

Title of Workshop

Date

1. Considering the Workshop as a whole, how would you rate its value to you?
   ☐ Much ☐ Some ☐ Little ☐ None

2. Please rate the value to you of the various parts of the Workshop. (Check the appropriate column for each part of the program.)

	Much	Some	Little	None
Opening General Session	_____	_____	_____	_____
Luncheon Speech	_____	_____	_____	_____
Closing General Session	_____	_____	_____	_____
Morning Discussion Group	_____	_____	_____	_____
Afternoon Discussion Group	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. What part did you think was of <u>most</u> value to you? _____
   _____

4. What part was of <u>least</u> value? _____
   _____

5. What areas or topics would you like to have discussed at future sessions?
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. Please make any other comments or suggestions which would assist us in planning future Workshops.
   _____
   _____
   _____

Your signature is not necessary. Please turn this in (use attached envelope) at the door after the final session. Thanks.

F. The "Conpar" Method of Conducting a Workshop

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This is a brief description of the "Conpar" techniques for stimulating and *con*trolling *par*ticipation in panel discussions and other workshop meetings. While designed primarily for situations involving two or more speakers, panel members, or resource experts, the method can be used to replace "making a speech" to management groups, parent-teacher associations, and other articulate audiences where the question-answer phase of the meeting assumes greater importance. The "Conpar" method is based on these propositions:

1. That people listen and learn better as well as retain and apply more of what they have learned when they help to determine their own needs for training, select the discussion topics, and actively contribute to the development of the discussion during the workshop.
2. That people want to participate when they can do so without making themselves conspicuous.
3. That workshop audiences prefer concise, extemporaneous talks in response to their own questions rather than the "set" speeches usually made by panel speakers.
4. That more is accomplished in a workshop when the atmosphere is informal, the program closely timed, and all speakers required to stay within time limits known to the audience.

In addition to the panel of speakers or resource experts, the "Conpar" method requires:

1. A Workshop Leader—Call him leader, chairman, moderator, or what you will.
2. A Workshop Recorder to preserve the questions and summarize the significant points of discussion at the conclusion of the workshop.
3. A Workshop Timekeeper equipped with some visible and audible device for timing Speakers and Buzz Groups. We use a large darkroom timer with a sweep second hand which can be set quickly and accurately in minutes and seconds and which gives off a loud, vibrating, buzzing sound resembling a mechanical Bronx cheer upon the expiration of the allotted time. The speakers stop speaking and the Buzz Groups stop "buzzing" as soon as the timer sounds.

There are various ways of using the "Conpar" techniques. Here are suggestions for using the method to control a meeting involving a leader and one or more additional speakers, panel members, or resource experts:

1. If you are the workshop Chairman, call the meeting to order, announce the topic to be discussed in the workshop, introduce yourself and the remaining members of the panel including the Recorder and Timekeeper. The Recorder and Timekeeper may be selected from the audience. Take no longer than two or three minutes for this purpose.
2. Announce that in this workshop the audience will select the topics to be discussed by the speakers; that the audience will be given time to analyze and respond to the speakers' remarks; and that the audience will be responsible for the success of the meeting as are the speakers.
3. State clearly that the time allotted to each speaker on each topic will be strictly controlled by this timer (point to it); that the audience will have an equal period of time to con-

sider and raise questions concerning the speaker's remarks and request further information if desired. To accomplish this result ___ Buzz Groups of ___ members each will be organized. (Select 6 to 20 Buzz Groups of 5 to 20 persons each, depending on the size of the workshop audience. Twenty groups of 20 each have been successfully handled in a "Conpar" workshop.)

4. Supervise the immediate organization of the Buzz Groups. Tell each group to take one minute to select a Chairman; ask the Chairman to immediately select a Secretary; and again call the meeting to order.

5. Announce the opening Speaker. Say that he will open up the discussion of the subject, outline important areas, suggest some pertinent problems, and mention several lines of inquiry that might well be pursued by the Buzz Groups. Mention that the opening Speaker will talk not more than five minutes as indicated by the darkroom timer; that the Buzz Groups will have five minutes after the Speaker concludes to consider his remarks and frame their discussion questions or topics, each Buzz Group being permitted to raise two questions or suggest two topics for discussion by the panel. State that each question or topic must be clearly written, if possible, in not to exceed ten words on a separate card showing the number of the Buzz Group and the number of the topic. (We usually distribute cards to facilitate recording Buzz Group questions and topics.)

6. Ask the Timekeeper to set the timer for five minutes and ask the first Speaker to open the subject. By prearrangement, the opening Speaker should exceed his time and get cut down by the buzzer. This amuses the audience and conditions Speakers and Buzz Groups for close time control thereafter.

7. When the buzzer sounds, stop the Speaker, tell the Buzz Groups to start "buzzing," set the timer for five minutes, pass out the prepared cards, and remind each Buzz Group to come up with two questions or topics which they would like to have discussed in this workshop. After four minutes remind the Buzz Groups that they have one more minute to go.

8. When the buzzer sounds, recall the Buzz Groups, ask the secretary of Buzz Group I to rise in place, give his name, and read the first item suggested by the Buzz Group. Then ask him to read the second item. Then ask him to bring both cards to you at the Speakers' table. If Buzz Group I isn't ready, move on to the next and come back later. Cover all groups rapidly. Do not permit any Secretary to make a speech in place of reading the questions or topics selected by his Buzz Group. As the cards are brought to the Speakers' table, arrange them in some logical order for discussion and tentatively assign each item to the Speaker best able to handle it on an extemporaneous basis. If there are duplications among the questions or topics suggested by the several Buzz Groups, combine them for discussion and discuss two or more together if possible.

9. As soon as all cards are in, read the first item in your proposed order of presentation, identify it by Buzz Group and item number, assign it to the selected Speaker, *ask him to bid the number of minutes he wants* to discuss it adequately, set the timer and let him talk. The majority of questions can be discussed adequately in from one to four minutes. (Do not let the Speakers take too

70

much time.) When the buzzer sounds, stop the Speaker, reset the timer for the amount of time just taken by the Speaker, and tell the Buzz Groups to consider the Speaker's remarks and be prepared to do one of the following:

1. Say that they are satisfied with the Speaker's discussion,
2. Ask an important question concerning what he said, or
3. Bring up another point they want him to consider.

As soon as the buzzer sounds, ask the Buzz Groups Secretaries to report the reaction of their group concerning the Speaker's talk. Cover all the Buzz Groups and list the questions or additional topics raised. You may then allot not to exceed one minute each to a discussion of the supplementary questions raised by the Buzz Groups. The supplementary questions may be answered either by the original Speaker or by another member of the panel. If the supplementary question appears to be of major importance, it may be added to the general list of discussion questions. If no member of the panel is able to answer the question, you may call for a volunteer from the audience and allow him one minute. There is no further rebuttal by the Buzz Groups following the answers made to supplementary questions.

10. After disposing of the supplementary questions raised on discussion item number one, read the next discussion item, asign it to a Speaker, let him bid the number of minutes he wants to discuss it, set the timer and proceed as before. Be sure to give the Buzz Groups an equal number of minutes to consider the Speaker's remarks and determine their reactions. Get their questions if any. Begin with a different Buzz Group each time so that each group will have the same opportunity to make original contributions to the discussions.
11. Repeat the process of assigning topics to Speakers, having them bid for minutes of discussion time, giving the Buzz Groups equal time and answering all supplementary questions raised by them until all discussion questions have been covered or until the discussion period has been exhausted.
12. Watch time closely. Save five or ten minutes for a final summary by the workshop Recorder. If your meeting happens to be one of several concurrent workshops scheduled to report back for a general summary session, ask your Buzz Groups to attend the general meeting, listen to the reports of the other workshops and applaud the summary given by your Recorder. Otherwise have your Recorder summarize immediately. In either case, before the Buzz Groups start to leave the room, thank both your Recorder and your Timekeeper and lead the applause for them. Then thank the other members of the panel and lead the applause for them. Finally, distribute literature and collect reaction sheets if any. Then adjourn to the general meeting or dismiss the workshop.

General Observations About the "Conpar" Method

After the first few minutes spent in getting participation and establishing close time control, these Conpar techniques are remarkably easy to use. The Buzz Groups soon adjust and concentrate on getting the information they want from Speakers. The Speakers find that the stimulus of talking to specific topics under close time control usually results in better thinking and speaking on their part. Indeed, many of them seem to do much better in the give and take of extemporaneous exchanges with a lively participating audience than they

normally do with the usual set talk to a passive audience.

The "Conpar Workshop" techniques are most effective when two to two and one half hours are available. Even then, it is unusual to cover all the questions or topics requested by the Buzz Groups. This makes it advisable to make a judicious choice of items so that all Buzz Groups will feel they have contributed to the subject matter of the discussions. Conpar Workshop speakers and panel members are usually selected because they have a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter. If questions are asked or topics suggested on which they do not feel qualified to speak, they should ask for a volunteer from the Buzz Groups to cover the item on their behalf and proceed with the analysis and discussion of his remarks.

Because of the extemporaneous nature of contributions made by Speakers in a Conpar Workshop, only the pump-priming Speaker who opens the meeting can be expected to provide an advance copy of his remarks. However, because these contributions are down to earth, with a minimum of theoretical padding and a maximum of practical suggestions, the conferees are likely to want some permanent record of the proceedings. It would be most helpful to make such a record and mail out a lightly edited version to all participants. Fortunately, when a record cannot be made, the major discussions are likely to stick in mind long enough to permit making a personal summary within a reasonable period of time.

There has been considerable experimentation with variations of this technique in all sorts of situations. We were amazed to learn recently that it has proved quite effective in sales meetings, alumni meetings, church conventions, summer conferences, and many other occasions when it was desirable to utilize the creative participation of articulate persons. It has even been carried to Europe and Asia as part of the U. S. Government's program of aid to other nations.

We will appreciate hearing of your experiences in using these techniques, particularly concerning changes, variations, and additions that you have found useful.

April 1965
Training Department
Fisher Body Division
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